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by
Ken Lewis

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Red on the Long Green

By Ken Lewis



Dramatic Mystery Novelet

IN MARSTON SWAMP at the edge of town, a man was laboring under a bundle. Silhouetted against the glow of the city beyond, it was an oddly grotesque bundle, long and bulky, forked at one end and hinged in the middle.

And it was heavy. The man never dreamed that anything could be so heavy! He had barely penetrated the fringe of the swamp; was less than a fourth of the way to his objective, the river channel, and already he was sobbing for breath.

The grass of the swamp tangled about his feet like the hair of graves. The mud of the swamp sucked at his boots like the

Every time Joe McQueen tried to break out of that blackmail trap, some new skulduggery popped up to plague him. Until Joe took the bull by the horns and made a pistol point payoff.



maw of some great leech. And the total absence of moon or star, so desirable from another standpoint, made the going that much harder. More than once he missed his way in the darkness and found himself floundering wildly through hip-deep water with the scum of stagnation upon it. Hidden roots snaked out to snare him. Sunken logs rose to trip him. At last he realized he could go no farther.

Groaning, he let the bundle slide from his shoulders and slip into one of the larger pools beside the path. Its sinking was a gradual process, punctuated by a few faint eddies and gurgles. Otherwise, the pool accepted its new burden passively. The last thing to disappear beneath its surface was the rubber heel of a size-eight shoe.

The man stood beside the pool a long time, breathing heavily, his ears attuned to the swamp. Then at last he turned with

a sigh and picked his way back to the car hidden in the clump of willows near the highway. He drove perhaps half a mile toward the city before he decided to risk his headlights.

Behind him, the sounds of the swamp flowed back to cover his exit like waves closing above a sunken rock. The frogs took up their ancient chorus, and the chitter of the small scurrying things heard only in the deepest dark resumed. The life of the pool began to readjust to the alien element it now contained. The bundle, so limp when the man had dropped it there moments before, stiffened imperceptibly in its viscid grave. . . .

AT THE moment when the bundle slipped into the pool, Joseph McQueen, city hall reporter for the River City *Courier*, paused before the door of his bungalow two miles north and carefully wiped his mouth.

He wiped his mouth because less than ten minutes before he had been roundly kissed by a tall, languorous brunette; and he did not want his wife, a honey blonde, to know about it.

Not that the kiss had meant anything to Joe. It hadn't. The brunette had taken him completely by surprise. Nevertheless, wives are apt to be touchy about such things, regardless of circumstances. Even starry brides, with the blindness of the first week of marriage still upon them. Like Sally.

She was curled on the living-room divan when he went in. She had on the long purple housecoat which set off her blue eyes and taffy hair. For a moment, seeing her there, he was conscious of the little catch in his throat that he often felt upon entering a room where she was.

She stood up, smiling drowsily. The top of her head was on a level with his eyes when she did that; for he was not a big man, though his fine proportions and keen vitality often made him seem so to her. Her blue eyes met his black ones and found them good. She pushed a hand through the dark curls above his forehead.

"Have a nice time, Joe?"

He nodded. "I guess so. But being an old married man kind of takes the punch out of nights like this. I kept wanting you there, too."

Her smile deepened. "Sweet." She wriggled her fingers for a kiss.

He bent to give it to her. But just before his mouth found hers, she turned her face away abruptly and pushed him back.

"I thought this party was strictly stag, Joe."

"It was, honey. Why, what's wrong?"

Her eyes had fastened on his collar, and they were very wide and bewildered and strangely hurt now. He looked down and tried to keep from cursing. The red smudge on his collar tip was unmistakeable.

"You don't have to tell me about it if you don't want to," she said in a tiny voice, after awhile.

He could feel the perspiration beneath his armpits. "Of course I want to! It's just that there's nothing to tell. After the banquet, some of the boys talked me into going to the Mocambo Club for a nightcap. This girl kept making a play for me there. It was so obvious that nobody missed it. The gang kept kidding me about her, saying I was afraid to even look at another woman now I was married. Well, I didn't want them to get the wrong idea—to think you were the kind of wife who wouldn't understand. So finally I called their bluff and asked her to dance."

Her face was still pale. "Who was she, Joe?"

"My gosh—I don't know! I never saw her before in my life!"

"And that's all you did? Just dance?"

He knew he was getting red now, recalling the kiss. He swallowed. "What else, Pet?"

"Then how did that lipstick get on your collar?"

He shrugged feebly. "How should *I* know? Someone must have pushed her against me while we were dancing. You know how jammed those nightclub floors are."

She studied her slippers a moment. Her eyes were veiled. Then, still in the same

small voice, "Was she—pretty, Joe?"

He could feel the tension begin to drain out of him. He grinned. "Umm, so-so, I guess. But she couldn't have held a candle to you."

The smile he'd been waiting for broke through at last. Her lips touched his cheek. "All right, Joe. But next time you let the boys think what they want to. Don't expect me to be *too* understanding. For a minute there, I felt like the jealousest wife that ever lived!"

He laughed and hugged her to him to cover the sudden weakness in his knees. Why mention the kiss at all, at a time like this? That would only confuse the issue.

Getting ready for bed, she asked him about the dinner. "How does it feel to be River City's Man of the Year? We've been so busy getting married, that you never did tell me much about how you earned it."

He tried to sound deprecating. "All in the line of duty, hon. The award committee just seemed to think that some stuff I wrote for the *Courier* had something to do with plugging up a few rat holes at the city hall."

"But—wasn't it dangerous? Arthur told me someone tried to kill you, after the first of those stories appeared."

He shrugged. "Some punk took a shot at me in the *Courier* parking lot one night. That's all. He wasn't trying to hit me—just to scare me. You could hardly expect the city hall gang to send me roses, after some of the things I said about them."

She sighed. "I'm afraid I don't know much about newspapers or politics, Joe. And I'm proud of you. Terribly proud. Only . . ."

"Only, Pet?"

"Only promise me you'll never let anything happen to you, Joe!" she said in a rush. "Not anything."

He laughed. "Honey, with you to come home to," he said, "I'll be the most cautious old fuddy-duddy who ever carried a press card. The Old Man will probably stick me on the copy desk or something, when he finds out how careful I am!"

The kiss she gave him then was enough to drive every thought of that other kiss out of his mind forever.

JOE HAD completely forgotten it by the next noon. His mind was on mayhem, not kisses. That's when he learned of Bliss Morgan's resignation. The story broke for the *News-Post's* last edition—a small item below the Page One fold, to the effect that City Treasurer Bliss Morgan, having suddenly been called to Florida by the illness of a sister there, had submitted his resignation to the city council.

Joe wasn't surprised that Charlie Farnham, the fat-faced mayor, had given the story to the *News-Post* first. The *News-Post* had always played ball with the machine. What did surprise him was that his old friend, Bliss Morgan, hadn't called the *Courier* to turn in the tip himself, before leaving for Florida the night before.

For weeks, Morgan had been the only bulwark against the dying racket element in the city hall. The machine was doomed; had only a month to go till the next election, when it was certain to lose its majority on the council. So it had decided to make hay while the sun still shone. It had jammed a series of last-minute measures through the hopper which would have made the old Boss Tweed gang look like pikers.

Only so far none of the measures had taken effect. They all called for the spending of city money—a great deal of money, most of which would eventually find its way back to the politicians' pockets—and so Bliss Morgan had been able to block them. Joe had dug up the long-forgotten clause in the city charter, which required all authorizations for disbursement to be signed by the city treasurer himself. And Morgan had simply refused to sign anything, except the minimum routine claims necessary to carry on city business.

But now, with Morgan resigning, the machine could name its own man to fill out his term. Long before the election, the treasury would be stripped bare.

To state it succinctly, the situation stank!

Joe said so when he stalked into the mayor's office, waving the *News-Post* clipping in one lean fist. "What do you know about this, Charlie?" he said.

And fat bald Charlie Farnham heaved his vast bulk back in his swivel chair and grinned. "No more than you do, Joe," he said. "Found the note and resignation on my desk this morning, when I came in. He must have typed them out and left them there on his way to the plane last night."

Joe's dark eyes glinted. "How do you know he took a plane?"

The mayor shrugged. "All right then, the train. Or maybe he drove. Don't see what difference it makes, long as he's gone."

"*If* he's gone," Joe amended grimly. "This is the first *I* ever heard of his sister in Florida. Did you know about her?"

"Why, no, can't say as I did, now you mention it. But then Bliss and I never were what you might call intimate."

Joe glanced at the note which had accompanied Morgan's resignation:

> *Called to Florida by the serious illness of my sister. Expect to be gone longer than the charter permits, and know you and the council would never grant me a leave of absence under the circumstances. So am hereby tendering my resignation.*

"This doesn't tell anything," Joe growled. "Not even her name, or the town where she lives."

There was something almost obscene about Farnham's chuckle. It held a kind of malign triumph.

"Happy hunting, Joe," he said. "Florida's a big state, and she might be married. Her name might be most anything."

His implication was plain: Bliss Morgan had sold out to the machine. He had chosen to absent himself from the city at the moment when his constituents needed him most.

IN THE pool beside the path in Marston Swamp, the bundle had now achieved its maximum rigidity and was already beginning to soften a little. No bubbles rose from it yet; but decomposition takes place quickly in a warm climate in the summertime.

One of the bundle's forked ends, which had caught on a sunken stump near the surface, stirred slightly as the tepid water laved it. A kingfisher, deceived by the glimmer of movement in the murky depths, plunged into the pool in search of food.

The faint splash caused by the bird's body disturbed the delicate balance between the bundle's natural buoyancy and the mud which held it. The stump bobbled a trifle, and the edge of a size-eight heel broke surface briefly, then submerged again. But this time it came to rest less than an inch from water level . . .

CHAPTER II

BLISS MORGAN'S disappearance was a bitter pill. So bitter that Joe McQueen refused to swallow it. If a man like Morgan could sell out those who trusted him, then there was no truth or honor left in the world. That, Joe was unwilling to believe.

A bachelor, Morgan had a small suite at the Riverview Apartment Hotel. Joe located the combination night clerk-switchboard operator and spent ten dollars finding out that the city treasurer had received no telegrams or long distance calls the night before. He had taken a local call in his room about ten p.m., and had left the hotel shortly afterwards. The clerk didn't know the nature of the call, but said that Morgan had taken no luggage and hadn't checked out. His car was still in the hotel garage.

A call to the airport revealed that no one resembling him had taken passage to Florida or anywhere else the night before. The same held true of Pullman reservations. That left only the busses and coaches—highly unlikely modes of travel, if Morgan had been hurrying to a sick sister's bedside.

The more Joe found out, the phonier Morgan's sudden leave-taking seemed. He returned to his typewriter, loaded for bear. If he could raise a big enough stink

in a short enough time, maybe the D.A. would step in and enjoin the council from naming a new city treasurer till the whereabouts of the old one could be discovered.

He was pulling the first take of his story from the battered platen when the copy girl handed him the envelope. It was a large envelope, labelled *Urgent,* and it had been mailed special delivery here in the city. He ripped it open.

Inside, he found a small block-pencilled note and a photograph. The unsigned note said:

Suggest you study the enclosed carefully before you decide to acquaint the waiting world with your suspicions regarding a certain trip to Florida. Or would you welcome a divorce at this time?

The photograph was an interior—the kind of scene that might have been shot by a keyhole camera with infra-red film. In the background the headposts of a bed appeared, against a wall which held one of those page-a-day calendars. The date on the calendar was plain. It was yesterday.

The foreground contained a closeup of a man and woman kissing. They were apparently sprawled on the bed, locked in close embrace. The girl's face was partly hidden, but the thin strips of fabric striping her bare shoulders might have been fastened to a lownecked evening gown—or a particularly filmy item of lingerie.

The man wore a coat, but his profile was unmistakeable. It was the profile of Joseph McQueen.

He stared at it numbly while his thoughts began to whirlpool, and a mounting suffusion of anger crawled up to his hair roots. The thing was a fake—he knew that much at once. But would he be able to convince anyone else of it? It had been very cleverly contrived, either by double-exposure or two superimposed negatives, so that there was no tell-tale break in perspective at all!

He knew then that someone wanted him off the Morgan case very badly.

He thought first of fat bald Charlie Farnham, then his mind went back in surging fury to the girl he had danced with at the Mocambo Club the night before. He remembered the bogus dizzy spell she'd staged while they were dancing: "If we could just go outside a moment for a breath of fresh air . . ." And the way she'd grabbed and clung to him, gluing her mouth to his, in the darkness of the parking lot outside.

He'd just supposed she was drunk at the time. He'd pushed her away and she'd run back inside. He'd climbed into his car and driven home.

But now he knew he'd been jobbed by one of the oldest and corniest blackmail rigs in the book. It would have been easy enough for a photographer, hidden in one of the neary cars, to snap the kiss with night film and then superimpose it vertically on the bedroom background, making what had happened seem like something else a lot worse.

His gorge tightened. If anyone thought he or Sally would fall for a gag like that, then they were crazy!

But when he turned back to the story he'd been writing, he found he had already crumpled its first page into a ball, and let it slip unconsciously into the wastebasket.

He let it stay there. He tried to tell himself that he needed more evidence; that that was all he was waiting for. But it was Sally's face which kept getting in his way—the way she had looked at that moment last night when she found the smudge of red on his collar tip.

Across the room, the Old Man was bawling at him, "Better get down to the city hall, Joe. Got a hunch Charlie Farnham's calling his stooges together to name a successor to Bliss Morgan."

Joe stood up heavily and went out.

THAT afternoon the council appointed Assistant City Treasurer Arthur Kennedy to fill out his boss's unexpired term. Joe was not too surprised. As a more or less minor civil service employee, Kennedy had always kept his politics to himself. But obviously he and the machine had now reached an understanding. Otherwise he would never have received the appointment.

Joe had known Art Kenndy a long time. The first time he ever saw Sally, she was dancing in Kennedy's arms. They'd been engaged at the time, but Joe hadn't known that—and it probably would have made no difference, had he known it. He'd cut in.

No one was responsible for what happened after that. It was just one of those things that happens, that's all. After the dance she and Kennedy had quarreled. Two weeks later she was married to Joe. It never occurred to him that he might have caught her on the rebound. He didn't care. All that mattered was that she'd said, "Yes."

After the council meeting, Joe went to Kennedy's office for a statement. Kennedy eyed him obscurely. He was a half head taller than Joe, smooth and rangy, with tawny chestnut hair and brown eyes set in a slender handsome face.

"I guess you can just tell your readers," he said, "that I feel highly honored by the trust the council has placed in me, and I shall do my best to restore a proper measure of co-operation between this office and the other branches of city government."

"Hogwash!" Joe snorted. "Why don't you let me say that you'll do your best to emulate the courageous example of your predecessor in withstanding corruption and dishonesty in city government? If the voters get the idea you're a second Morgan, you might even be re-elected in his place."

Kennedy drew thoughtfully on his cigar. "I think we'd best leave Morgan out of this," he said at last. "I'm not so sure he was the simon-pure protector of the people that you and the *Courier* built him up to be. I've seen enough around here the past few weeks to make me think he may have had a damned good reason for skipping out just when he did."

Joe's eyes narrowed. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm not sure—yet. But I can tell you this: I'm going to work night and day if I have to, checking the records. And if my hunch is right, you'll read all about it some fine morning—in the *News-Post.*"

Joe could feel his tendons cording. "Is that one of the things your deal with the machine included? Finding some way to smear Morgan's name, now that he's not around to defend himself?"

Kennedy's thin lips quirked sardonically. "That's what I like about you, Joe," he said. "You always suspect the wrong people. But maybe you've got something there, pal. If I'd been a little more suspicious myself, maybe I could have kept you from stealing Sally."

Joe's jaw flexed. "Nuts!" he said harshly. "You were all washed up with Sally before I ever asked her for a date. Now I think I'm beginning to see why!"

Kennedy's grin was still mocking. "Good-by, Joe," he said. "And remember—keep your eyes on the *News-Post.*"

It was dark when Joe got home from the office. He found Sally strangely distraught and distant. "Working late again, Joe?" she asked. "Or beating off girls who wanted to dance with you?"

The barb in her words brought him up short. He noticed that her eyes were red-rimmed, as though she'd been crying. Had the blackmailer sent her that damned picture anyway, regardless of the fact that he'd killed his story on Morgan? If so, he'd better get his explanation in, fast!

"Look, Sally," he said. "About last night—"

"Oh, forget about last night!" All at once she was in his arms. "I'm sorry, Joe," she whispered. "I guess I was just tired and disappointed. You promised to take me to a show tonight, and now it's too late. But I know you'd have made it, if you could."

Oddly, her words failed to bring him the relief that they should have. After thinking about it awhile, he knew why. Nothing had been settled, only postponed. The story would still have to be written, sooner or later. The Old Man was no fool; he'd know Joe was covering up something. And what had Art Kennedy been hinting at? Was there another reason for Morgan's sudden leave-taking; one that had nothing to do with selling out to the machine?

He spent a restless and uneasy night.

IT WAS the morning of the second day after that, when the story Kennedy had alluded to burst like a star shell across the *News-Post's* front page. It had taken that long, Mayor Charlie Farnham explained, to fully untangle the ex-city treasurer's records. But the job, when done, was nothing if not conclusive:

More than fifty thousand dollars of the city's funds were missing!

Joe was glad he hadn't put his first suspicions into print, now. Things were bad enough, without another wrong guess. While he and the *Courier* had been singing Morgan's praises, as the "only honest official in the city hall," that same official had quietly set about to gut the very treasury he was supposed to be guarding! He was probably somewhere in Mexico by this time.

After that the phone call was almost an anti-climax. It came through the *Courier* switchboard that afternoon.

"Mr. McQueen?" said the male voice at the other end. "Ajax Photo Service. Just called to tell you, you can pick up that negative you wanted tomorrow morning."

"Negative?" Joe said dully. "I didn't order any negative."

The other voice got nasty. "Okay, buddy, make up your mind. Either you get it, or your wife does."

Something began to stir in the back of Joe's brain. "Wait a minute," he stalled. "What's that again?"

"You heard me. First thing in the morning—we open at eight. And don't forget, a job like that costs dough. Lots of dough."

There was a coldness in the pit of Joe's stomach. He tried to ignore it. "How much?"

"Oh, make it a couple of grand for a starter." The line clicked dead.

The bungalow was dark when Joe got home. A note on the table said, *Gone to the movies, Joe. This time I got tired of waiting.*

The place reeked of stale tobacco fumes. He was already throwing open a window before he remembered that Sally didn't smoke. Then he caught sight of the cigar band in the ash tray near the door.

He tried to shrug it off. It had probably been left there by some repairman Sally'd had in to fix something around the place. But he couldn't help remembering where he'd seen that same kind of band before: In the ash tray on Arthur Kennedy's desk at the city hall. Not that that meant anything, of course. Thousands of men must smoke that same brand.

He decided not to mention it to Sally. Undoubtedly it had no more significance than that smudge of red she'd found on his own collar tip, four nights ago.

She came in around ten. He thought he heard a car door slam out front, just before she stepped up onto the porch. But he didn't rush to the window to see.

"Have a nice time, baby?" he asked.

She shrugged. "At least it beat sitting around here all night, alone."

OUT in Marston Swamp a feathery ground mist had begun to creep from thicket and slough. And with it, from the pool beside the path, there mingled an effulgence still so faint that ordinarily the swamp cat would have ignored it.

But this was no ordinary night. The swamp cat was starving. Three days ago she had left part of one paw in a steel trap, and since then she had been unable to kill enough game to satisfy her needs. She localized the scent and moved toward it.

The pool was now three inches lower than it had been four nights before. During that time no rain had fallen to counteract the evaporative influence of the sun. As a result, the heel which had started its upward progress with the plunge of the kingfisher into the pool, was now completely exposed to the air. So was part of the stump top on which the heel rested.

The swamp cat noticed this and vaulted to it. Whining almost imperceptibly, she began to tug at the shoe which still barred her access to a possible meal.

It was a futile process. The leather was too well bound to that which it en-

cased, to pull free. After awhile, still mewling disconsolately, the cat forsook the stump for land again.

But once more, the forces which held the bundle to the bottom, and the contending forces which strove to push it upward, had been realigned. Under the slight wallowing motion caused by the cat, the rotting shreds of blanket which had originally swathed the bundle, parted.

The bundle turned slowly against the bottom, free of the encumbering mud at last.

CHAPTER III

THE Ajax Photographic Service was housed in a two-room hole-in-the-wall office on lower River Street. Joe McQueen reached it a few minutes before eight a.m. He didn't have any two grand in his pocket, but he did have the bellygun from the dash compartment of his car. All the fury and frustration of the past four days had crystallized into one driving purposing in his mind: to get that phony negative, and punish whoever was responsible for it.

He tried the front door and found it open. The outer office, with its three shabby chairs and reception desk, was empty. He pushed on into a two-by-four studio, with a row of filing cabinets against one wall.

And there he stopped, while his eyes swelled and his pulses pounded drunkenly.

A man lay face up on the floor. A tall cadaverous man with staring eyes, and a deep-welling gash in his bald crown. A heavy steel tripod lay across him, stained with blood, and he was cadaverous in more ways than one:

He was stiff and cold.

Joe knelt to scrutinize the thin face. He could not remember ever having seen it before. A small scrap of film protruded from the grey lips, as thought the man had been in the act of chewing it up and swallowing it when he was killed.

Joe pulled it free and held it to the light. He recognized it as part of the negative he had come here to retrieve—the part which showed his own profile.

The implication was obvious. The murderer had known Joe McQueen was involved with this man. He had placed the scrap of film between the dead lips, in order to saddle Joe with the kill.

Joe struck a match and watched the film go up in smoke.

It was while he was doing this that he heard the street door open, followed by the clack of high heels crossing the outer office. The match burned his fingers. He snuffed it out.

A gasp came from the connecting door behind him. He turned just in time to catch a glimpse of a bitterly familiar face. The face disappeared. He ran after it.

He caught her just as her fingers reached for the inner knob of the street door. He spun her around. He even remembered her perfume. It was the same scent she'd been wearing at the Mocambo Club four nights ago.

His fingers dug into her shoulders, forcing her down into one of the chairs. She collapsed limply, her face an ashen mask framed by blue-black curls. Her lips moved feebly, mouthing the words:

"Mr. Lochard—is he—?"

He jerked his head toward the studio. "Lochard. That his name?"

Her nod was scarcely perceptible.

"This his pitch? You work for him?"

Again the nod, arrested as soon as it began. "No—no! I was just passing by—"

"Your lips lie better than your eyes," he said. "Who did it?"

She looked directly at him for the first time, her eyes swelling incredulously. "But I—I thought—"

He shook his head. "Not me. He's been dead for hours; since sometime last night."

"Then—then it must have been that girl—"

"What girl?"

"The one who hired me to kiss you that night. She came again, yesterday. They were in the studio, quarreling, when I went home. But I never thought . . ."

"Who was she? What did she want to frame *me* for?"

"I—I thought she was after divorce evidence. That's what most of them come here for. I didn't want to do it, but it was

easy money. And a girl has to eat—"

"Don't you know her name? What did she look like?"

"Nice. Not what you'd expect at all. Nice taffy hair and big blue eyes. She didn't look like the kind who would kill a man—"

ALL at once Joe McQueen was sick at his stomach. A lot sicker than he'd been at the sight of the corpse. The corpse hadn't meant anything to him, but this— He had to be sure.

Numbly, he dragged his card case out of his pocket, showed her the snapshot beneath its cellophane window. Again her eyes widened wonderingly.

"Why, yes, that's her—"

He saw it then, the whole miserable thing. Sally had married him on the bounce, after quarreling with Kennedy. But almost at once she'd begun to regret it. So she'd come here to arrange for the phony evidence she needed to get a divorce. Her jealousy at finding that lipstick on his collar had just been an act. She'd known all about the kiss before it happened; she'd planned it that way.

Meanwhile Lochard, playing both ends against the middle, had figured to collect twice on his fake picture. Once from Sally, for providing her with divorce evidence. Once from Joe, for promising to keep that evidence secret. Had he gone a step further—sold a third print to Bliss Morgan, for Morgan to use in keeping Joe mum while he himself made good his escape into Mexico?

That would mean that Lochard knew of Morgan's plans in advance. Morgan wouldn't like that. So had he, in turn, arranged to have Lochard killed, after his own exit from the country?

It seemed pretty far-fetched. But on the other hand, why should *Sally* kill Lochard? How could she knew that he was planning to double-cross her? It just didn't make sense.

And neither did the way he felt about her, now. He should have been burned up, though, now that he knew what she'd tried to do to him. But just because one party to a marriage falls out of love, it doesn't necessarily follow that the other has, too. Somehow, no matter what she'd done, he knew he was going to do his best to keep her out of this. At least until he'd talked to her himself, made sure she was guilty.

The sound of a siren, still three blocks away but coming fast, broke into his thoughts. He turned to the brunette.

"Keep her out of this!" he said harshly. "If you even so much as mention her to the cops, I'll see you get a nice stiff rap for blackmail, as Lochard's accomplice! And remember, I've got a certain picture locked in my office desk, to prove it!"

She nodded bleakly.

The siren died in the street outside and heavy footsteps crossed the walk. Joe thought fast.

"Hello, Finney," he said, to the beefy bull-necked cop who threw open the door. "So you got an anonymous tip that there was a body here, too."

Lieutenant Harold Finney, homicide squad, grunted noncommitally. "That how you happen to be here, Scooper?"

Joe nodded and ushered Finney in to view the corpse. "His name was Lochard," he said, "and he ran this joint."

Finney impassively studied the body, then spoke to the photographers and print men who had followed him in. After that he took Joe back to the outer office and stood staring down sourly at the girl.

"Who's the girl friend?"

"Lochard's secretary. I haven't had a chance to find out her name yet."

The girl's face was blanched with fear. "Malden," she said, in a barely audible voice. "Marilyn Malden."

Again Finney grunted. "She do it?"

Joe's head shook. "Not for my money. If she had, I doubt she'd have dropped around again this morning. She came in after I got here, chasing down that phone tip. She seemed pretty flabbergasted to find him that way."

She glanced at him gratefully. Finney turned. "All right," he said to the plainclothes man guarding the door. "Take her down to headquarters for questioning."

Joe's face tightened.

JOE had to go through with the rest of his role then. Phone the Old Man; make the motions of covering the story for the *Courier*. It was dark before he dared to leave Finney's side. Twice he did manage to call home. But he got no response.

The house was deserted again, when he finally reached it. And again a note lay on the living-room table. A note clipped to a print of that phony photograph, this time:

> *I can't go on any longer, Joe, after this. Don't try to find me. I just want to go away somewhere, and try to start over . . .*

His lips quirked bitterly. Go away somewhere—to Reno? But what would she use for money? She had none of her own.

Then he got it—that cigar band still in the ash tray by the door. Of course, Arthur Kennedy would finance the divorce. She was probably over there now, completing the arrangements.

He had to stop her—warn of the danger she was in. No telling when Marilyn Malden would crack; what she might already have told the police. He knew that, when the chips were down, the brunette would take her chances on a blackmail rap, rather than murder.

He ran out and climbed into his roadster.

Kennedy lived alone in the left half of a ground-floor duplex in Marston Heights. Joe didn't want to have the door barred in his face. He rang the bell and called in a high cracked voice, "Special Delivery."

After a moment, Sally herself answered his ring. Her face was white and drawn, her eyes nervous. "I'll take it, b—Joe! Oh, Joe—*please* go away! I told you not to try to find me—" She tried to block the door, but he pushed past her.

Arthur Kennedy stood across the room near Sally's packed grip, one hand on the chair arm behind him as though for support. He was dressed for a fishing trip, his flannel shirt sweat-stained, grey mud caked to his boots like dried mortar.

Joe ignored him, turned to Sally. He saw her eyes were red-rimmed again. But she made them hard, now.

"You've got to listen to me, Sally," he said.

"There's nothing to discuss, Joe. Please go."

Across the room, Kennedy said brittlely. "You heard the lady, McQueen. On your way—now! I'm driving Sally to the depot."

"You're crazy!" Joe said savagely. "She's wanted in a murder investigation! If she leaves town now, the cops'll be sure she did it!"

Kennedy's hair was limp across his forehead, and his brown eyes were hard and bright. "What kind of a stall is this? Why can't you take your licking like a man, McQueen? You certainly asked for it. Now, beat it!"

Joe tried to shake the red film out of his eyes. He lunged forward. Too late, he saw that the hand Kennedy had kept behind him contained the blue steel of an automatic. The gun chopped down, and he felt himself falling, while pinwheels exploded behind his eyes. Then a great wave of darkness engulfed him, and he lay inert across the carpet.

THERE is a legend that a corpse submerged in water will rise to the surface on the third day. About the only merit in this legend is the fact that, all other things being equal, a submerged corpse will rise to the surface *sometime*. Maybe three days, maybe three hours, maybe three weeks. It all depends upon a number of factors.

Factors such as the amount of air in the lungs at time of death. The balance between the body's weight and its displacement. The temperature of the water, which regulates the rate of dissolution. Oh, any number of factors.

The bundle in the pool in Marston Swamp had been a singularly unprepossessing object at best, with its ungainly overall limpness and the small red-smeared hole in its top. Now, after yielding for more than a hundred hours to the forces at work in the pool, it held even

less aesthetic appeal. It was larger, for one thing, and even more shapeless. But it was still quite definitely recognizable.

It rose to the surface on the fifth day.

CHAPTER IV

SALLY McQUEEN hunched in the driver's seat of the sedan and mechanically obeyed the traffic signals. Her arm ached from the rigidity with which she held the wheel. Terror lay like a drug across her senses. It seemed utterly fantastic that this man beside her, this hollow-eyed stranger who kept an automatic trained on her breast, had once been a person she trusted, even thought she had loved.

"Turn here," he said. "And remember, not over forty. I don't want to have to shoot a highway patrolman."

The car left the last street light behind it, began to glide through a low flat landscape over which a new moon bright as a silver penny hung. Their destination was apparent to her long before she caught the first glint of oil-black water ahead. She knew now why he wore those boots.

He switched off the lights and had her leave the highway to park behind a screen of willows on the right. "Get out," he said, "and pick up the suitcase. Follow the path. I'll be right behind you."

She knew he meant with the automatic trained on her back.

They began to thread their way into the swamp. Small sucking sounds came from the path at their feet. From some far bar ahead, a curlew called. She had no inkling of where they were headed, and she was too far spent to care. Her only sensation was one of relief that it would soon be over.

And then, suddenly, she did care. It was the pain which shocked her back to life, made her realize that she was not yet willing to meet death passively. One of her feet caught in a tangling vine; a quick sharp twinge speared up from ankle to kneecap. All at once she was tumbling like a rag doll down the small ravine the path skirted at this point.

The voice above her cracked shrilly under its tension, "Get up! Come back here!"

She did neither. She kept rolling. Vines wrapped her in welcome camouflage. Bushes intervened and she wriggled through them. Then she was on her feet again, running for the cover of the larger trees ahead, half-screened from the knoll by the low copse behind her.

The first shot splashed the darkness there.

Twice she sank to her thighs in scum-filmed water, felt the mud leeching at her shoetops. Twice she dragged herself up again and stumbled on. She reached the dubious shelter of the grove at last, staggered through it to the third row of trees. There her ankle gave way without warning, and she collapsed in the shadow of the nearest stump.

After that first wild flare of panic there had been no more firing. He must know that she was hurt, that she couldn't go far. Now she could hear him circling purposely through the brush behind her, and she learned that he had brought a flashlight here. Its glow receded, then drew nearer. She knew that it would be only a matter of time.

She closed her eyes and lay full-length on the ground, savoring the limpness of utter exhaustion.

BACK in Arthur Kennedy's apartment, Joe McQueen groaned and opened his eyes. Waves of recurrent pain washed through his brain. His stomach shuddered uncontrollably. For a moment he wondered vaguely where he was and what he was doing there.

Then, gradually, it came back—the fight, and his reason for bringing it on, Sally's imminent danger of arrest. Something else came back. The last two fragments of thought that had formed in his mind, just before Kennedy's gun chopped into his skull.

First, the gun. Kennedy had had it in his hand, even *before* Joe reached the apartment. He had been using it to make Sally co-operate. She had tried to warn Joe away, to tell him of the danger that lurked inside.

Second, the mud. The caked grey mud

on Kennedy's boots. There was only one place around here where mud that color could have come from. The mud was dry —Kennedy had been to that place the last time he wore those boots. And now he was headed there again with Sally.

In a single blinding flash of insight, many things were clear to Joe McQueen that hadn't seemed to make sense before. Not everything, but enough to make him realize that his wife's life hung in the balance.

He stood up groggily and staggered for his car, his head clearing with the effort.

He was driving mechanically, scanning the highway shoulder for some trace of a parked car, when the shot rang out deep in the undergrowth to his right. He jammed on the brakes, pulled flashlight and revolver from the glove compartment, and plunged into the swamp.

There seemed to be a kind of path. He followed it, moving fast, yet with an unconscious caution about making undue noise. And then he caught the glow of the other flashlight, flickering through the trees a hundred yards west. He snapped off his own light and began to stalk it.

He had cleared the last intervening tier of brush when the beam ahead found the girl at the base of the stump. Remembering the shot he had heard earlier, he triggered instinctively at the source of its glow.

There was a hoarse animal cry of shock and pain, and the light looped groundward, nuzzling into the mud. A shot knocked bark from a branch above him, and he fired again at the winking gun flash.

"Wait!" the hoarse voice screamed. "Wait! I'm dying!"

He edged behind a live oak bush to the left, risked his own light toward the sound. It picked out Arthur Kennedy's sprawled form, resting on an elbow thirty feet between bush and stump. Kennedy's left hand clutched his own right shoulder. A dark stain spread slowly across the shirt fabric there. The glint of blued steel came from the marsh grass ten feet beyond.

"Sally," Joe called. "Are you all right?"

"Joe! Oh, thank heavens, Joe! Yes, I'm all right—except for the mud in my hair and a sprained ankle."

THE flashlight beam still centered on the man on the ground. "Stand up, Kennedy," Joe said. "You're not hurt that bad. You'll live to hang for this night's work."

Kennedy laughed harshly. "Don't be silly. We pulled off the road to do a little necking, and got into a lover's quarrel. She ran into the swamp and I followed. Then you, the jealous husband, came along, having got suspicious and tailed us from town. Naturally, she couldn't be expected to admit the truth in front of you—in front of a court."

Joe made a Herculean effort to ignore him. "Can you walk, Sally?" he called.

"Yes, Joe. It's still numb. It hasn't begun to hurt much yet." She limped into the circle of light.

"Good. Then pick up his gun. By the barrel. Don't touch the handle or trigger."

"You started shooting at me in the dark," Kennedy said. "Naturally, I shot back. Twice. That will explain the *two* cartridges missing from the magazine."

Joe prodded him to his feet with the revolver muzzle. They began to wind their way slowly back toward the path.

"Joe," Sally said hesitantly as they walked. "He made me do it. He came to the house and said he was going to warn me for old times' sake. That he'd heard through his connections at the city hall that the machine was out to get you for good, if you got in their way just once more.

"He said it was up to me to find some way to stop you. That threats did no good —they'd tried that—and next time they'd shoot to kill. Well, I thought and thought. I was terribly worried, Joe. I knew that just my asking wouldn't keep you from doing whatever you thought was right. Then I hit on that fake picture scheme, counting on your love for me to be stronger, maybe, than your sense of duty.

"I know it was wrong of me, Joe. Terribly wrong. But I did so want to keep



you from being hurt, maybe killed. I couldn't think of any other way to do it. I agreed to give the picture to him, and he would send it to you anonymously the next time he thought you were in danger of doing something the machine wouldn't like."

"It was corny, baby, that's all," Joe said softly. "Just plenty corny. I should have known you wouldn't fall for a gag like that, unless you had dreamed it up yourself. Then Lochard, the photographer you'd hired, tried to use the picture to blackmail you, didn't he?"

"Yes. He called me to his office and demanded money—a lot more money than I could scrape up. He said if I didn't bring it to him that night, he'd sell the picture and the whole story to you in the morning."

"So you went to Kennedy and asked *him* for help."

She nodded. "We drove down there last night, and he went in while I stayed in the car. . . . When he came out again, he said Lochard had threatened to implicate *him* to you, too, if we didn't pay off. That they'd fought, and Lochard had hit his head on a tripod and it had killed him. He said it would just look like an accident—which, in reality, it was—when the body was found."

"*Her* word again," Kennedy said. "Just her unsupported word. You two, being mutually blackmailed, will make a lot better suspects than me when the truth gets out."

"But this morning," Sally went on, "when I heard over the radio that there was no doubt about Lochard having been murdered, and that that girl in his office was under suspicion, I called Arthur right

away. I said we'd have to tell the police now. That I wouldn't let an innocent person come under suspicion for something we'd been responsible for. He said all right, that he'd come right over—but for me not to do anything until he got there. That we'd face the police together."

"Only instead of calling the cops when he arrived, he pulled a gun and made you write that note about leaving me, didn't he?" Joe said. "That was to cover your disappearance, after he'd killed you to keep you from talking, and had hidden your body out here."

"Ye-es, I guess so, Joe. But I still don't know why—what it was all about."

"I DO," Joe said grimly. "It was about fifty thousand dollars he planned to embezzle from the city. He made a deal with the machine to be appointed city treasurer if anything happened to Morgan. Then he got rid of Morgan, planning to lay the embezzlement on him. But he needed time, after he got into office, to get his hands on the money and arrange the frame by altering Morgan's books."

"Nuts!" Kennedy said. "Morgan took the money and scrammed. You saw the note he left on Farnham's desk, didn't you?"

Joe shook his head. "You wrote the note and resignation and left them there that night, before you killed Morgan. As his assistant, you had plenty of chance to run them off on his own typewriter, and to practice forging his name. You knew you didn't have to worry about a police investigation. The machine would see to that. They were satisfied to have Morgan out of the way; they didn't care why. And the *News-Post*, being the machine's mouthpiece, would accept Morgan's Florida trip at its face value, too, for long enough. Then, Morgan was a bachelor. He had no family or close relatives handy to press an investigation.

"But you were worried about me. You knew if I raised a big enough stink in the *Courier*, the D. A. might step in and void your appointment till Morgan's disappearance could be satisfactorily explained. And that would stop your embezzlement before it even got started. So you went to Sally and enlisted her aid in keeping me quiet, preying on her inexperience in such matters, and her fear for my life."

He broke off and took an unsteady half-step to the right. The edge of the flashlight's arc, playing through the brush before them to light their way, had caught on something white. Something white, floating in a pool beside the path ahead.

He stared at it a moment, at the bloated size of it, and the puffy features, and then he saw the blue-lipped hole in its crown. He exhaled slowly.

"You called Morgan to a rendezvous on some pretext that night," he finished queerly. "And then you shot him and disposed of his body."

Kennedy and Sally still hadn't seen it. Kennedy laughed. "You think you can make a thing like that stick in court?" he asked. "Even if the note and resignation should prove to be forged, that doesn't mean *I* did it. It might have been anyone in the machine. With Morgan where he is now, no one will ever know."

"Yes," Joe said softly. "They'll know, all right. And they'll know who killed him. They'll find that the slug which snuffed out his life came from this same gun you've been carrying tonight. They'll find plenty—when they know where to look."

Something about the way he said it made Kennedy turn. His eyes caught on the white thing in the pool. Gradually, as though impelled by some occult force beyond his power, he began to inch toward it.

Joe stepped back, screening off Sally's view. He focused the flashlight.

"Take a good look, killer," he said.

Kennedy screamed.

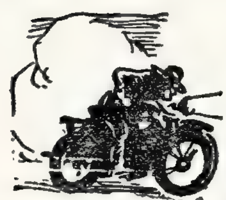


X Marks the A-Bomb

By C. M. Kornbluth

The big-city reporter figured he'd ferret out a scoop story from the atombomb works. But when that secret landed in his lap, he found that the only one he'd live to tell it to would be the Old Nick himself.





YOU'D be surprised if you knew what's going on. I was surprised right into District 17—but that's getting ahead of the story. What story? I'm going to write this one down and tear it up, or maybe burn it, because there isn't a paper or magazine in the country that could get away with printing it. They'd be closed and maybe in jail, or maybe in District—oops! There I go again.

I could begin at the beginning, but when was the beginning? Was it Los Alamos in New Mexico, was it Oak Ridge, was it the first uranium pile under the University of Chicago football stadium, or was it Hiroshima going up like a matchhead?

I'll skip 'em all up to, say, V-J Day. Let's make it V-J Day in the New York *Daily Bulletin* city room. I'm the handsome young man of forty-five arguing with the city editor about an expense account. Suddenly everybody goes crazy, the war is over, justice has triumphed, paper goes sailing around the room.

And I hear Arnheim, the obit writer, murmur gently, "So Allison did it . . ." There is a queer, abstracted look on Arnheim's face, like a man waiting for you to pick up his dinner check.

About a week later, in the middle of an interview with the latest English novelist in on the Clipper, came the click. Percival was saying, "—nor can one deny the semian ingenuity of the Ammeddican professional clawsses—" and then the click came. Percival saw it in my face and stopped dead.

"Indisposed, old thing?" he asked, and whipped out a little leather-covered bottle. I emptied it—*good* Scotch—thanked him and raced for the taxi stand.

I was standing threateningly over Arnheim ten minutes later. Threats got me nowhere; he was tight as a clam in the R months. But I got him in a booth at the corner bar for lunch and shocked him by setting up the drinks. Arnheim never could say no to liquor, which is why he's still an obit writer. Lunchtime was long over, and Arnheim was three sheets and a spinnaker in the wind when he broke down and drooled out the story, or as much of it as he knew.

The Allison he'd been babbling about was, of course, the late Hamish McGregor Allison, Ph.D., minor physicist, Columbia man, mourned by his colleagues at his untimely death early in '43. The joker was that Allison wasn't dead. Arnheim had written enough obits and checked enough sources to know a phony when it turned up. Everything was on paper in the Allison business. There were witnesses who couldn't be located but knew all about it. There was a statement by a doctor who just happened to be unavailable. Nobody seemed to know when and where the funeral had been held. A phony.

What you get for nothing in the news-

paper business you can stick in your eye. I had to fight for three hours with the city editor to get assigned to the Manhattan Project story. This was when the generals were finally talked down by the scientists and allowed a few reporters to look at the outside of some of the equipment. I wanted the assignment because of my lead on Allison, but didn't mention it—yet. I had visions of a headline like, *A-Bomb Scientist Foils Spies by Death Plot.* Maybe, I thought, there were dozens more like that from all over the country!

I GOT the assignment from under the science editor's nose by arguing that it was a layman's view the readers wanted. The next day I was on a special train leaving from Penn Station with an MP lieutenant sharing my seat. He was from Dixie and talked about houn' dawgs. The three-car special was full of newspaper men and MP lieutenants, except for half of the rear car, which was partitioned off and was supposed to have Enrico Fermi and his escort of two majors and a sharpshooting master sergeant in it.

The windows were painted over and the MP's wouldn't let us gentlemen of the press talk to each other, so it was one of the lousiest trips I've ever taken. It lasted fifty-two hours—a diner was hooked on at decent intervals—and we must have taken some kind of roundabout route, because I'd swear we got out in Mississippi or thereabouts. The train stopped at a siding and we all got out and stretched.

It was a five-hundred acre clearing in a second-growth forest of pine and scrub oak. The strongest, tallest wire fences I've ever seen ringed about three dozen concrete block buildings of assorted sizes, and they were reinforced with more MP lieutenants with, alternately, tommy-guns and repeating shotguns loaded for bear.

We were assigned to one-man cubicles, each with a cot, a desk, and a typewriter, shower stall, and Modern Convenience. We would sleep in there, write our stories in there, and be loaded back onto the train in forty-eight hours. We would be guided through the works in parties of eight. There would be no conversation during the tours, or at mess, or in the cubicles.

Some character in an officer's uniform but without insignia, an OWI or War Censorship boy, I thought, lectured us. MP guards would be stationed in the corridor of our quarters to prevent conversation; ask questions only of the guides; the National Defense Act was still in force; all stories written here would be censored before leaving the place; silence during meals again; have fun while you're here but don't abuse the privileges you've been granted.

Privileges!

We went to our cubicles and cleaned up for dinner. I half expected my MP to climb into the shower with me, but he didn't. He just watched to make sure I didn't try to sneak a nucleus into the cake of soap.

We were marched to the messhall and picked up a tray apiece as we went in. Here, I figured, is where we got a look at some of the personnel. The only personnel we got a look at was the line of cooks who hurled gobs of food into our trays; the rest of the five-hundred man hall was empty.

"Hot, isn't it?" I said to the cook in charge of the mashed potatoes. He gave me a scared look as an MP's hand fell on my shoulder.

"I'll be good," I said, and continued silently down the line. That potato cook had the only face in the camp that wasn't chiselled out of granite. We ate and filed back to our cubicles. We could write or sleep or both until nine the next morning when the tours would start. I got a change of guards at about eight P.M. I guess the houn' dawg man was as sick of me as I was of him.

"Look," I said to my new boy, pointing out the window. "You call this security?"

"We do," he said. "What's the matter with it?"

"There ought to be a roof over the place. You can see the stars, so by celestial nevigation you can find out where this place is located!"

That tickled him, because he was a washed-out navigator who'd made the grade in the MP's. We got into a nice conversation.

"Ever hear of anybody named Hamish McGregor Allison?" I finally asked.

"Sure," he said.

"Is he at this installation?"

"I saw you try to talk to him on the chowline."

"The cook?"

"That's right. How'd you know his name?"

"It was just a guess," I said, my head whirling. "Good night." I tried to go to sleep. Of course I had studied photographs of Allison before coming out here, of course it was the same man.

I passed out at about two in the morning, still spinning like a top.

SO HELP me, they blew a bugle at six. A.M. They hauled off, took a deep breath and blatted the horn until we held our heads. The character in the officer's uniform without insignia yelled along the corridor, "Everybody out! Everybody!"

We piled into the corridor and saw the MP guards drawn up in stiff attention, looking scared and white. The character was bawling them to hell and gone out. He stopped short when we appeared.

"You reporters stand out here in the corridor," he ordered. "Your quarters are going to be searched."

I sleep raw, personally, so I asked him if I could get some clothes.

"No," he said coldly. "You may not." And mine was the first room he and two MP's began to search. The other MP's watched us nervously; just how nervously I didn't realize until every cubicle had been ransacked and we'd been allowed to dress and form outside.

The character addressed us in the chilly voice of a judge sentencing a fiend. "You men," he said, "are in very grave personal danger. One or more of you has stolen—something—from this installation and hidden it. I shall be entirely within my rights if I put you all under confinement, ship you to Washington, and see that you stand trial. The trial, of course, will be by a military commission, and closed to the press and public, and will probably result in every one of you being shot as surely as if you were German spies.

"Actually, I am sure no danger to the country's security was intended, but the Espionage Act, U.S.C. 31 and 32 amended, does not discriminate between malevolent theft and reportorial pilfering. I want the guilty person or persons, or anybody having any information, to step out now.

I stepped out. The character studied me icily and nodded to the rest. "Return to your cubicles," he said. "Guards, don't leave them alone."

To me he beckoned simply. As we walked off two of the soldiers followed. The four of us went to the nearest building, and sat down in a bare little office.

"Tell your story," said the man to me.

"Questions first," I said. He seemed to swell and grow bright red, though actually he probably just flushed and sat a little straighter.

"All right," he choked.

"Stop me if I'm wrong," I said. "You maintain constant secrecy in this installation, and this is the first case of disappearance, coincident with the arrival of the reporters. You therefore assume that the reporters, in spite of their guarding, managed the theft. Right?"

"Right," he said grimly.

"Wrong," I said. "The thief is one of your personnel. He's a minor physicist who faked death years ago, presumably on a tip about the Manhattan Project, and worked his way in as a cook. Up to now I've been assuming he was *for* the project; I see now that he's *against* it. I don't know if his angle's sabotage or what, but I know the man. He hasn't even changed his name, which was smarter than it seems on first thought."

"Who is it?" the man yelled. His nerve had finally gone.

"What's the hurry?" I asked.

He shot to his feet and took me by the lapels. "You—incredible—imbecile!" he grated. Then he let go and sat down

with a sigh. "No," he said. "Your just don't understand the importance of it. Just tell me right now, taking my word that there's reason for speed, who the man is."

"I'm a reporter," I said. "I don't give anything for nothing. What's the hurry?"

"I'll tell you," he said tiredly. "You'll be sorry, but I'll tell you." He waved the MP's out. "This place is the bomb depot. Every atomic bomb is delivered here when it's assembled. We get five a month. Even a bush-league physics instructor with the—the part that was stolen—could— Oh, nuts! *Tell me who it was!"*

I've never seen a man trembling as he was trembling; it was like a tuning-fork; he was on the verge of collapse. So, when I thought it over, was I.

"One of the cooks," I said. "Hamish McGregor Allison is his name."

THE man tore out of the office without me, waving on the MP's who were waiting outside. He ran for a barracks-like building and I ran behind the three. He yelled for more MP's from the fence patrol, and they streamed after in a ragged wedge.

We charged into the barracks, neatly labeled *Cooks' Quarters,* and the man, panting, ran his finger down a list of bunk numbers. Cooks all around us in various stages of undress were getting off their cots and babbling. The man strode to the twelfth bunk on the left and shook Allison awake.

Two MP's held his arms while another searched him. He found a little, shiny gadget around his neck on a string. It was quickly passed to the man in the officer's uniform who pocketed it at once.

He sat down on Allison's bunk and said weakly, "Guardhouse. Four men in the cell with him. Bring his records to my office."

The MP's left with a silent, burning-eyed Allison. We went back to the bare little office as a dossier arrived by jeep.

We looked over the dossier together; he seemed to have made up his mind about me—I didn't know then just how.

He called in two captains and a major who blinked at me and got to work on the dossier, which included a birth certificate—Aberdeen, Scotland, 1900; naturalization papers, Cleveland, Ohio, 1923; marriage license, Cleveland, 1925; affidavits of restaurant owners in Cleveland, Dayton, and Columbus, 1925, 1927, and 1933. License of his own restaurant, "Mac's Hamburger Spot," Columbus, 1935. Death certificate of his wife.

The three officers studied the stuff for ten minutes in total silence. Finally one of the captains said, "Jap."

The major gave him a look and the other captain promptly said, "Kraut. Film-grain, grammar, punctuation, margins, thoroughness—it's Kraut."

"Yes," said the major. "It's Kraut. Who let this through?"

"Lieutenant Gilbert," said one of the captains, looking at the dossier's jacket. "He's been discharged."

"A pity," said the major. His fists clenched as if they were wringing something, and the three left.

"I suppose I should thank you," said the man in the officer's uniform. "Instead—"

An MP knocked and came in. "He's talking, sir," he said. We raced out and piled into the soldier's jeep.

It took us to the guardhouse where Allison was sitting with his head in his hands, babbling and babbling at the floor. He didn't seem to care whether anybody heard or not. He said over and over that he'd failed somebody named Caledonia, then it was the Fatherland he'd failed—

After an hour's babbling we got five minutes worth of sense out of it.

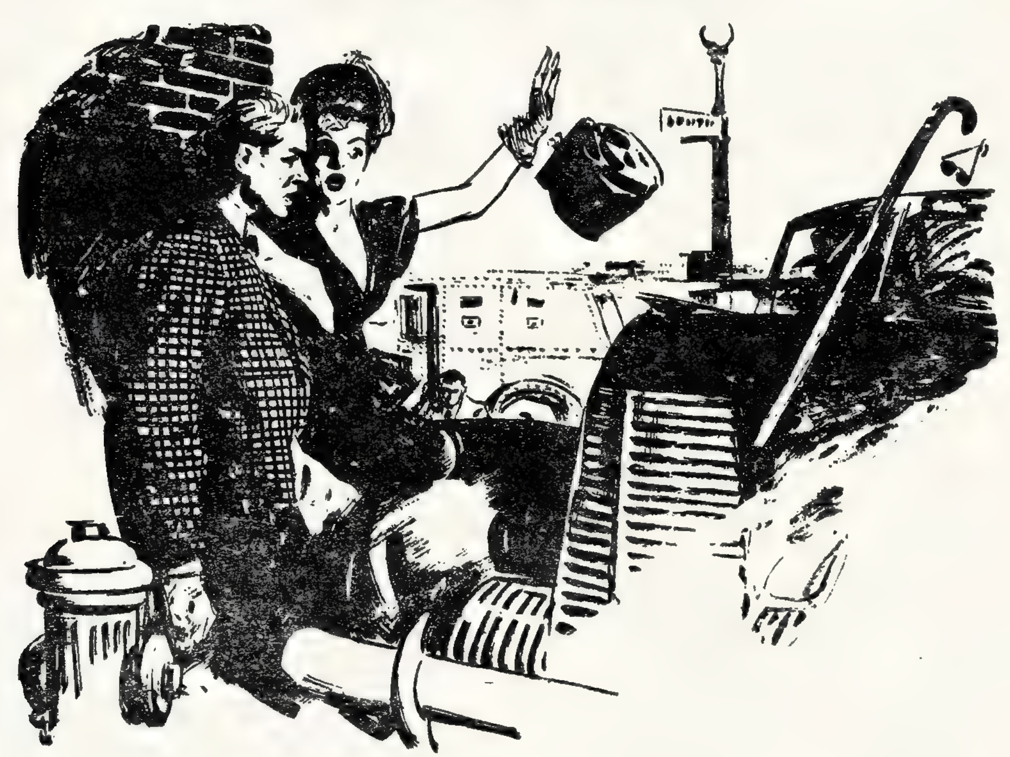
Allison was a Scotch separatist. He was as ready to commit murder for the freedom of Scotland as the Sinn Feiners had been for Ireland. Like the Sinn Fein in the last war Allison had been approached by German agents in this one. They'd arranged everything—his faked death, his faked record of employment.

He was totally unable to see the rights and wrongs of the war. The Germans were, he thought, for Scotland's freedom so he was for the Germans. He was going to blow up London, he was, and he was

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Armored Car Rendezvous

By Lawrence DeFoy



To spot the fingerman who had delivered his wartime buddy to a sudden grave, Paul Evans hopped a ride on the dead man's armored car. But when crime's rendezvous was reached Paul found himself collecting for the ride in tommy-gun carfare.

THE purchasing agent was out for the afternoon so I decided to go back to my hotel. I was strolling past the Tri-State National Bank in the warm spring sunshine when I heard, "Lootenant Evans! I'll be a dirty name if it ain't!"

I looked around. The city was new to me—the whole territory was new. I was certain there must be some mistake, even though the thunderous voice was vaguely familiar.

A thick-shouldered man in a grey uniform was bounding down the worn brownstone steps. Under his visored cap peeped unforgettable carroty hair, and his florid face was one huge grin.

My own jaw dropped. "Pink Nolan, you old jungle rat! Is this *your* Springfield?" We pumped hands, standing there in the middle of the sidewalk. People smiled sympathetically and walked out around us.

"Surest thing y'know!"

"But—why the rig and the gun?" I queried, slapping the leather holster.

"This?" Pink jerked a thumb toward a battleship-grey armored car behind me. *Acme Protective Bureau* was lettered just below a small gun-turret on the side.

"My job, you remember. My gosh, we talked about it enough in them lousy foxholes on Guadal. Talked about everything, trying to keep from going crazy!"

"That's right. Now I remember," I said.

"Yeah. And that reminds me. I'm on dooty now, not supposed to go gabbin' with anybody. We gotta get together, though. Look, how's about coming out to the place for dinner? I'll phone the wife and— You can make it, can't you?"

"Pink, just try and keep me away. You know, all this time I've been wondering if Jerry's as pretty as those photos you used to show me nine time a day."

"She's a real looker, Loot, wait'll you see." Pink puffed up like a pouter pigeon. "Come out about six, huh?"

"You bet," I said. "But maybe we'd better drop the titles, Sergeant. Your wife might get the idea we're still Marines."

"Well, ain't we?" Pink demanded. He gave me his home address. "See you later. I gotta get back to work."

I felt good, walking on around the corner. You don't meet old friends in every strange city, and Pink Nolan was something more than a friend. . . .

ALMOST without volition my thoughts went back to those weird, unforgettable days and nights when the shrieks of jungle birds mingled with those of taunting Japs, and the staccato hammering of intermittent machine-guns riveted through both. Odd, how realistic it was, after all this time. I could hear—

I stopped, whirled. It was real! The shrieks were from tires and human throats—the gun *ha-ha-ha-ha-ed* balefully.

I was running back to the corner. People came spilling around it, yelling. Windows of office buildings slammed open. A motor roared, and a large, low-slung sedan came shooting into the street, cutting across the sidewalk. I barely had time to flatten against the foundation of a building when splinters of granite were whipped from the wall above me. Nearby a running woman went down, stumbling, her mouth wide in terror.

Then the car was gone, rubber treads howling around another corner. I twisted in time to catch a quick glimpse of a white, blurred face, peering out the rear window—the face of a boy or a woman, rather than of a man.

The space before the bank was deserted save for bodies sprawled here and there. Two were struggling to sit up, but Pink and another uniformed man lay motionless near the gaping rear doors of the armored truck. A third, whose leather puttees tagged him as the driver, slumped with a smoking pistol on the running board. He seemed to be whistling tiredly through prominent teeth.

I went down on my knees beside Pink, cursing a fate that sent a man halfway around the world in battle, then allowed him to be shot down in the gutters of his own hometown. Nolan had taken a burst in the chest. I had seen too many sucking wounds to be optimistic. His face was now putty-colored, his eyes were open but unseeing.

"Gun—gun," he gasped, blood flecking his lips. "Gun . . . miss . . ." The carroty head lolled back toward the pavement

My throat was too full for swearing. Why, I'd been talking to Pink not five minutes ago! Probably Death was even then riding the streets in the long, low sedan.

The memory of the car brought back a measure of clarity and I looked around. Heads were protruding here, bodies beginning to edge into sight there. Far-off whistles kept shrilling. Farther yet, sirens rose to hectic howls. A babble of voices began coming closer and closer—until the monstrous clangor of a gong high up on the wall of the bank drowned them out.

What had Pink been trying to say? The "gun missed?" Obviously it hadn't, if he was talking about the bandits' machine-gun. But Pink, dying, wouldn't be concerned about that, would he? A .38 service revolver teetered on the edge of the curb and I reached for it automatically.

His gun misfired! That was what Pink Nolan was trying to say. Pink had been a Marine, among whom care and use of

weapons is a fetish. Naturally, to have a gun misfire at the crucial moment would weigh on his mind.

I thumbed out the cylinder. The empty chamber, which Pink normally carried under the hammer, was three turns down! The gun had missed not once, but thrice!

Then I looked closer. There were no firing pin dents on the caps. Sudden anger gripped and shook me so that I could scarcely breathe. What kind of an outfit had Pink been working for—to arm him with a gun having a defective firing pin?

OLD LUKE MARCOURT'S wavy white hair was the softest thing about him. There was nothing lax about his ash-tough big frame, his deep-set eyes which brooded, as he stood by the cemetery gate, over the mourners returning to their various cars.

"So you want Nolan's job? Well, since you gave up your own, I suppose I can't say no. But I still don't get what you hope to find out. Believe me, Evans, Pink's death hits me as hard as it does you. But it's one of those things, after all. Apt to happen to any of my boys anytime."

I kept my mouth shut. I couldn't tell him I was sure they'd try again, sometime, somewhere. I couldn't tell him Pink Nolan was murdered, that someone on the inside had tampered with his gun. Marcourt was on the inside himself.

"It's what they're hired for, you know. Damn bad luck Nolan got hold of a bad gun, but—"

"And that his helper had to faint—right at the critical moment." My irony was pretty raw, but I was still furious.

Marcourt looked embarrassed. "Yeah, that was bad, too. But old Long John Nehrbass had that bum ticker—not dangerous, just weak. Maybe I should've pulled him off armored-car duty. Naturally, if you don't want him with you, Evans . . ."

So you were sorry for him? I thought. "Let him stay," I said aloud. "I want the whole setup just as it was."

Marcourt shook his head. "You don't figure these hoods'll try again, do you? Even if they get away from the police and the deposit insurance investigators—"

I had been watching a slight, quick-stepping man in a camel's hair coat passing down the row of parked cars, thinking he was dressed rather jauntily for a funeral. Just then he turned to look back over his shoulder at the door of a cream-colored convertible. I grabbed the old man's arm. Those boyish features!

"Who's that? The bird down near the end of the line?"

Old Luke's hawk eyes flicked around. He frowned. "Candy Horn. Minor office holder over at City Hall. Hmmm, wonder what he's doing here? Nolan hated his guts."

"Candy?" I said.

"They used to call him the Candy Kid. Baby-faced glad-hander with a smooth line of chatter. Maybe he hopes to pick up a few votes out of this." Luke's voice dropped suddenly. "Here's Mrs. Nolan coming. Get my car door open, will you?"

Geraldine Nolan was approaching unseeingly, but with her chin high. She looked more pathetic than if she were shedding the tears I felt to be close to her clear blue eyes. Pink had been right, his wife was far more beautiful than shown in the cracked, begrimed photos he had carried in his camouflaged jumper pocket. Even now she was vibrant with life.

"This way, my dear," Marcourt said gently, guiding her toward the polished black limousine. "Oh—uh—this is Mr. Paul Evans, another good friend of your husband's."

I bowed, but her blank eyes swept over my face without stopping. I wished I could do something, say something, to ease that taut, animal hurt. She got into the car and Marcourt followed her. He hesitated, seating himself, then jerked his chin at me.

"You better come along with us, Evans. There may be some things . . . All right with you, my dear?"

Mrs. Nolan's head turned and she saw me, standing in the door. "Please," she invited. "I've just remembered. You're Lieutenant Evans who saved Pink's life once, aren't you? In the South Pacific?"

I got in, awkward as a schoolboy. "It was the other way around," I said simply. "He was the kind of man you appreciate under fire—brave and efficient and, above all, dependable."

"The police said you talked to him just before . . ."

"Yes, I did."

"About what?" Her lips were parted slightly, her whole body tense. She waited to hear of her dead husband's last words, his last conversation.

I wasn't much good. "Very little. He said he was on duty and couldn't talk, but he wanted me to come to dinner—said he'd phone you—" I stopped, appalled.

For at last the tears came, like a torrent. And it wasn't to old Luke Marcourt she turned, oddly enough. She buried her face against my shoulder. I held her close, as a brother might, glad for her relief but angry at myself for causing it.

THE job wasn't difficult. In the first few days I learned the simple routine. We transported bank, jewelry wholesalers', and private estates' valuables in the rear compartment of the truck; sitting guard, en route, in bucket seats under the turrets or on the hardwood locker top, occasionally peering from the bulletproof windows which closed the narrow slots.

I was assigned much of Pink Nolan's equipment, a fact that pleased me. I had the worn Sam Browne and holster, the repaired .38 police positive, his pad of receipts and carbons. The other armament was general. On big jobs Nehrbass and I each got sawed-off riot guns. Bucky Newsome, the toothy, good-natured driver, was assigned a Thompson submachine-gun for the stops which was kept in the locker other times.

Long John Nehrbass, Pink's former helper, who had a sourpuss that hated the world, tangled with me the very first day.

"I hear ya been makin' cracks about me to the boss."

I looked him over. He sat with his feet on a pile of coin sacks and his back against the inch-thick, case-hardened armor which was the truck's side panels. The gunport between us and the cab, where Bucky was driving, was shuttered. There was nothing to prevent me from telling him off in the way I felt he deserved. On the other hand, this lean, sneering character with the "weak heart" was a lead I wanted to follow to the end.

"I don't know what you mean by cracks," I said. "I asked about you when I took over Nolan's job, naturally."

"You figgered my passing out was a phony, don't tell me!" Nehrbass had a habit of never looking directly toward you when he talked, but looked up out of the corners of his eyes.

"Marcourt would know more about that than I would, Nehrbass. Don't holler before you're hit. We've got to work together, you know, for awhile."

"Yeah? I can always transfer, don't forget."

"Not very handily," I said. "The whole bureau will suspect you've gone yellow." It was all I could do to hold back a sneering, "You haven't, have you?"

He grunted, at a loss. Then he thought of something else. "By rights, you ought to be my helper. I had this truck, then Pink comes back and gets it again. Now he's dead and you calmly step in and cut me out. Just watch it, pal, that's all."

It was an armed truce, of a sort. I was just as happy. If Long John Nehrbass was the inside man, I'd find out sooner or later. If he wasn't— Well, I didn't want to get into the habit of depending on him when the showdown came.

Another employee of the Acme Bureau —which included an audit section, a store detective agency, and an insurance claim investigating unit as well as the armored car service—who interested me for more reasons than the purely social and business was an ancient ex-patrolman by the name of Paddy Hanrahan. He was the office supply clerk, and custodian of the locked cabinets which contained all the armament.

"Ye'll turn in yer gats and shillelaghs every ayvnin' at five, mind," he instructed me. "Exceptin', o' course, thim nights yer workin', d'ye see?"

I had already learned that one night each week the truck was sent to pick up

late receipts at the big department stores for deposit, and that currency transfers were occasionally made at night.

"And what do I do on those nights?" I asked, slipping a package of the old man's favorite tobacco across his desk. His faded, Killarney-blue eyes thanked me, but his manner retained its severe importance.

"Thim nights I work late meself, o' course. The pistols must all be in their coop before I lock up."

I nodded, thinking. "Paddy, would it be possible to substitute one gun for another, either in your cabinet or when it was being turned in?"

Hanrahan snorted. "Not likely, me bhoy. Each man of ye's assigned a particoolar weapon, y'understand. The number o' that gun ye call out to me every mornin' when ye take it out, and agin every ayvnin' when ye turn it in. I check it off on me little list, d'ye see, and divil a substitute will I take."

"You always do that?"

The old Irishman grinned, showing snaggle teeth. "Well, now, there ye got me, lad. On thim late nights, when we're all a bit tired, and there's only the three of ye to be checked, I sometimes omit the ceremonies. That's betwixt you and me and the inkstand, now—if the boss was to find out . . ."

I felt my neck prickle with premonition. Was this a break? Pink's murder had occurred on a morning after a "late night!" But then I shrugged. The gun would be checked out by number in the morning, in any case.

I took the gun Paddy had slid across the desk, read off the number to him, then snapped out the revolving chamber. The firing pin had a glint of newness.

"The old pin was really broken off, you say?"

"I did," Paddy nodded. "Me bhoy, I know what yer thinkin', but I been repairin' sidearms too many years not to know a clean break when I see wan. No file marks on that pin."

I, too, lowered my voice. "I wasn't thinking of file marks, Paddy. A filed-down pin would be too obvious. This had to look like the accident you call it, otherwise—" I broke off. I had been about to say, "Otherwise the inside man could be traced." But Paddy Hanrahan, wrinkled and benign as one of his leprechauns was also an inside man, an extremely logical suspect.

"Accident it must've been," the old clerk was sayin. "Oh, I know 'tain't usual —a firin' pin breakin' off at the croocial moment, mind. But it's been known to happen before, laddy. A flaw in the metal, belike, the snappin' o' the trigger on an empty cartridge after range practice . . . No, bhoy, if ye don't understand some o' the strangest things in the world kin go wrong wit' weapons, and thim used every day, ye don't know guns, that's all."

And if you think a professional guntoter and Marine wouldn't notice a flaw that serious, you don't know Pink Nolan, old-timer, I thought. But all I said aloud was, "It's a pretty far-fetched coincidence, that 'accident'."

ONE other person I made it a point to see. Not because Candy Horn could possibly have fritzed the gun, but the memory of his resemblance to that blurred, boyish face in the rear of the bandits' car was crying to be matched.

I had to make a frontal approach. I found him in a small cubbyhole off the city clerk's office. His bright face and brighter raiment was out of place here as my neat grey uniform.

"I'm working for Acme," I said bluntly. "I took over Pink Nolan's job."

His eyes looked up at me frankly, but it seemed they were watchful, too. I couldn't get the idea out of my head that I had seen him before, and not too long ago. But there was nothing—absolutely nothing—to make me think it had been in the death-dealing gang car. He was no boy, close up; past thirty, I'd say.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Mr.—er—Evans, is it? Naturally, we were all shocked that so horrible a crime could be committed in our fair city, but—"

"They tell me Pink hated you. Why?"

Horn blushed rosily. "I don't know. Honestly I don't. I liked Pink, myself, even went to his funeral. But I can't think of any reason . . . Unless it was

because of that little tiff we had when Mayor Miller was running for re-election, before the war. I was a party worker, of course, and somehow Nolan got it into his head that I forced Luke Marcourt to contribute. Really, the whole thing was ridiculous. I told Nolan that."

Hardly more ridiculous than the cock-and-bull story, I thought, looking down at his bland face. Still I couldn't stir up any definite recognition. The sudden thrill I'd had when I saw Horn looking back over his shoulder by the door of that expensible convertible was dead. But thinking of that expensive convertible...

I looked around. "This job can't pay too well," I said, with plenty of meaning in my words.

"No, indeed," he agreed easily. "But since I've a little money of my own, and have decided to make public service my career, it really doesn't matter at this stage of the game."

I couldn't get to first base. All I could hope, as I took my leave, was that—if he *was* involved with whoever had jimmied Pink's gun—I had appeared brash and stupid.

After that time began to drag. I began to drag with it; summer is no weather for riding in an armored car. Besides, I was continually fighting a losing battle against encroaching doubts. After all, what did I have to base my suspicions on, other than a knowledge of Pink Nolan's careful habits? My idea that the gang would try again—what was that but a theory that when you get away with a good thing once, you try it again?

Everybody in the bureau was friendly enough, other than Long John Nehrbass, but I couldn't allow myself to thaw toward them. In my search for clues to the inside man, I couldn't afford to have my judgment clouded.

As things will, given time, the sharpness of my rage at the foul treachery of Pink's killing began to dull. And then there was Pink's widow. I had seen Jerry twice at the office, when she dropped in to arrange the compensation settlement. One day I called her and took her to lunch.

I was oddly glad to see her sorrow was fading. Radiantly alive and impulsive women like Jerry aren't meant to mourn overlong, and nobody with feeling likes to see a butterfly in a net.

"Pink used to say I was a balloon, and he was my anchor," she smiled, when I commented on her liveliness.

"How did you stay anchored when he was off in the South Pacific?" I asked, toying with my coffee.

I thought she looked troubled. "Not awfully well, Lieutenant—I mean, Mr. Evans—"

"Paul."

"Paul, then. But that's water over the dam. Let's talk about you. Tell me all about the job. Pink used to."

I told her, keeping back only my theories about her husband's death. They were beginning to look a little silly, anyway. She knew all about the work. It never occurred to her to wonder why I—a machine-tool sales representative—had taken it over.

I knew, even while I was talking shop that I had fallen in love with Jerry Nolan Searching back, I realized it was no new thing—I'd loved her ever since Pink had first shown me those crumpled, cracked photos of her. I had buried it then, not even knowing I had done so. Now it was in the open. Did she guess? She was looking at me strangely. I couldn't say anything yet. Not now—less than five months after Pink's killing.

ABOUT a month later I got back to the office one afternoon to find Marcourt wanted me. It was three o'clock or so. As I hung my coat and holster belt in the deserted operatives locker room, I suddenly felt fed up. I went toward Marcourt's office with the intention of telling him I was through.

Jerry was there. She smiled and said, "Hello, Paul."

Old Luke shot quizzical glances at us from under his furry eyebrows. "Late transfer tonight," he grunted around his cigar. "Shipment from the Union Trust for the Federal Reserve. Currency. Hundred grand or so. Want any more men?"

"What for?" I shrugged. "We'd only fall over them."

He nodded. "Okay, then, get to the side entrance to the bank at nine sharp. They should have it ready by then, they said. Your time's your own until then."

"I've just had a marvelous idea!" Jerry gasped. "The dinner's not out, after all. Couldn't Bucky and Long John pick up Paul at my house in the battleship-on-wheels? It'd only be a couple of blocks out of the way, Luke."

"What?" Marcourt growled. I looked puzzled.

"You see, Paul," she said, "I dropped in to invite you for that dinner Pink . . . never arranged. But this meany"—she reached over and rumpled Luke's white hair— "said you had to work. But you don't have to work until later and—"

"Why can't you make it another night?" Marcourt said, jerking back in mock displeasure. "And leave my hair alone!"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" Jerry looked at us. "I didn't, I guess, I'm so excited! I'm leaving on the midnight plane for Miami. Going to spend the winter with an old school chum down there. And I do so want to have that dinner, Paul, if—"

"Do what you like! Do what you like!" Marcourt snarled. He didn't fool me; I knew he loved Jerry like a daughter; that he, too, had been concerned for her sudden bereavement. "Just so the boys are on the job at nine, I don't give a—"

"It's almost right on the way," Jerry said, whirling around the office. "I'll go talk to Bucky myself. He'll do it for me." She flung open the door, blew Marcourt a kiss, smiled at me, saying, "About six-ish, all right?" and vanished.

Marcourt gave a fake cough. "Watch yourself," he said, not looking at me. "She's a great girl, but wild." Then he grinned up like an old satyr. "Me, I always liked 'em like that."

I didn't grin back. The old man snorted suddenly.

"Look here, Evans, why don't you loosen up? You don't trust me, do you?"

"I don't trust anybody in the bureau, Luke."

He scowled. "Why not?"

"Pink Nolan trusted all of you."

Marcourt took his cigar and flung it in the wastebasket. "Still got the bug biting you, huh? Evans, why don't you drop out? It's damn near six months, and—"

"You want me to quit?" I had forgotten I meant to quit when I came in here.

Marcourt nodded. "You're not doing any good for the morale of the rest of the boys, you know."

I went to the door. "All right, but mark my words, you're going to have another loss one of these days, Luke. Just like the last. I tried to have it focus on me, but . . ."

"Bosh! Oh, maybe we will have another raid, someday, but it'll be coincidence. Nothing 'inside' about it!"

I shut the door solidly behind me and went back to the operatives room. It was still deserted, but I had the idea someone had just been there. My locker was open, my coat and holster belt on a hook apparently the same as I left them. I unsnapped the leather flap and withdrew my gun.

The short hairs prickled at the nape of my neck with that premonitory chill. *It wasn't my gun!*

I knew it even before I glanced at the serial number. Everything told me—the weight, the balance, even the slight difference in the feel of the grip. I snapped out the cylinder; the firing pin was intact, as far as I could tell.

I began to get into my coat. Maybe the pin was set to break at the first shot, I didn't know. But one thing I did know—someone had learned about the Union Trust job, the biggest we'd had in months and a night job to boot. Things were breaking at last! The insider was showing his hand again!

I decided to go down to the NRA gallery for my gun-testing, rather than to the police range. And I went out of the bureau without even requisitioning extra .38 shells from Paddy. No one was going to learn from me that his sleight of hand had been discovered.

THE Nolan bungalow sat in a row of similar homes, squat, deep-porched and friendly. A few yellowed leaves

spotted the pocket handkerchief of a front lawn. I went up the walk.

Jerry answered the first ring, eyes alight and cheeks flushed. "Right on the button, Paul. Hang your cap and harness on the hall tree, there. Everything's just about ready to come out of the oven, but we'll have time for one cocktail if we hurry. Will you mix it or shall I?"

I looked around the cozy entry, slipping the Sam Browne shoulder strap over my head. "Thanks, but I believe I'll take a raincheck, if you don't mind."

Jerry had been heading back past the polished staircase toward a bright kitchen. She turned abruptly, eyes shadowed. "None at all? Paul, you don't believe you'll have trouble?"

"Oh, no," I said. "Just that I'm plenty stimulated anyway, dining with you. I don't want to overdo it, Jerry."

She started to laugh, then broke off, watching me. I thought she was going to say something, but she turned away.

"Upstairs to the right, if you want to wash up," she called, clanging open the oven door in the kitchen.

My hands were still a little oily from cleaning and assembling the gun. I went up the stairs, noting how much the place looked like a doll's house. I couldn't picture the broad-shouldered Pink being at home here. There were two doors to the right, both closed. I grabbed the knob of one; it was locked. The other opened into the tile-and-chrome bathroom.

The dinner was a success, from the beef roast to the baked pudding. As in all things about her, Jerry had mastered the difficult art of cooking and serving attractively. I had a couple of bad moments when I recalled she was going away, perhaps out of my life for good. I wanted to talk to her about us, but something held me back. Instead we got to talking of the house, and I wondered if there wasn't someone to share it with.

"Oh, my brother George stays here occasionally, but he'd rather live in a big hotel downtown, where there's lots of life. He and Pink didn't get along well. I guess I got out of the habit of depending on him. I don't miss him."

She talked on about George—I got the impression he was a selfish and self-sufficient sort—and about her friends and her schooldays. I studied the sapphire blueness of her eyes, only half hearing. I didn't hear the telephone interruption.

"Luke Marcourt," Jerry said, coming back from the front hall. "He said to tell you the bank will be ready sooner than they thought. Bucky's getting here a little before eight instead of nine . . . Oh, good grief!" she wailed, looking at the clock over the dining nook, "it's almost seven-thirty now!"

I insisted on helping with the dishes—clowning with one of her tiny aprons, although I didn't feel much like it—and we were just finishing up when I heard the blast of the armored car horn out front. Jerry went to the door with me, watching as I got into my Sam Browne, buckled it.

I tucked my cap under my arm and took both her hands in mine. "If I come—" I started to say, "If I come out of this," then changed it to, "If I come back before it's time for you to leave, may I see you to the plane, Jerry?"

She looked up at me; there was no more laughter in her eyes, only shadows. "Of course, Paul," she said.

Bucky Newsome gave me a tough, friendly grin as I got into the cab with him. "Have a lovely dinnah?" he ribbed.

I started to answer in kind when I caught sight of something that changed the whole trend of my thoughts. As the truck swung away from the Nolan bungalow I just barely saw the open garage behind it and the rear of a cream-colored car!

My throat felt tight, dry. Behind me, through the steel walls, I could hear Long John knocking his pipe on a rivet. My hand went to the holster, settled on the butt of my gun.

My gun! Not the one that had been substituted in the operative's locker room that afternoon, but my own gun—formerly Pink's. I couldn't be mistaken, but I drew it forth anyway, peered at the serial number under the dash lights.

"Matter?" Bucky asked, glancing at me curiously. "Get somebody else's cannon, Evans?"

I swallowed hard. "No," I said, and I was surprised to hear my voice so composed. "No, this is mine, all right."

Mine. I knew without looking that the tiny round knob of the firing pin didn't project under the hammer. The gun had been taken for the express purpose of *breaking* it off; in a vise, perhaps, or by smashing with blunt tools. My head was in a whirl as I shoved it back into the holster.

So it's Jerry, I told myself, over and over. It must be her. She was at the office this afternoon—knew about the shipment, knew about my gun in my locker. But even if others had the same chance then, none did tonight. None! Only Jerry . . . probably when she went to answer the phone. If she hadn't had that opportunity, she would have made one.

WE PARKED in the narrow street beside the Union Trust. One of the bank guards opened the side door for us—the door nearest the gaping vault where clerks were sweating under brilliant lights, checking, making up packets of currency, packing and locking wooden, rope-handled strong boxes. Long John carried a riot gun under one arm, and shifted it as we each seized one of the handles of those cases ready to go. I didn't even come to enough to tuck back the flap of my holster.

She was responsible for Pink's death! I realized groaning. That was the bitterest thought of all—and in the brief instant of its thinking, I passed from love to hate. Just as responsible as if she'd fired the burst that killed that defenceless, blindly devoted carrottop. I thought then my memory jerking backwards, Maybe she did! She was in that car. It was her face I saw at the rear window. Her's!

We carried out the cases and stacked them in the van, Bucky Newsome standing guard, opening and closing the doors for us. He was whistling some tune between his protruberant teeth and holding the submachine-gun cradled in his left arm.

Candy Horn's car in her garage, I lacerated myself. What's between them? Did Pink suspect? Was that why he hated Horn? Had Jerry been two-timing Pink all those months he'd been yearning over those grimy photos? And did he find out, when he got home? I hoped not. And, recalling Pink's pouter-pigeon chest when I last saw him, I didn't think he did.

We were half finished with the loading before my dazedness began to give way to sickening despair which in turn became reckless, cold fury. I became a killer, pure and simple, wanting nothing more than to meet up with Jerry's cutthroat gang—the sooner the better. If I came out of it I meant to go back to that sweet, homey little bungalow and take that white throat between my hands and—

There was a sudden glare of light in that gloomy side street, a blare of sound! A huge car came lancing down on us, tires screaming. I was caught in the cone of the headlights and dropped to one knee beside the steps, my hand slipping inside my shirt to where a flat automatic had been slung in my armpit for nearly six months.

"Get down, you fool!" I yelled at Long John. He was making for the rear of the armored truck—the fortress. Then I began to hear the shots, although none seemed directed at me. I saw Nehrbass go down, clutching at his chest. At first I thought it was another fainting spell—he was still protected from the swerving car when he fell—but I saw his hand wetting red.

The car was heading to cut us off from the truck. The rear doors were opening. *Where in hell's Bucky?* I thought. I held my fire until the car was close, then sent three shots through the windshield. The driver's shadowy form jerked, then slumped. The car mounted the curb and smashed against a streetlight standard.

"Bucky!" I yelled, directing my fire at the sedan's open doors. A burst of laughing death came, then, but at me! Chips flew from the stone steps, dust blinded me. I felt a rap on my forehead and saw whirling lights. A warm, sticky trickle crossed the outside corner of my eye and I wiped at it, backhandedly.

"Damn you!" I cursed Bucky. That burst was no wild accident, no panic oc-

currence. Bucky was trying to kill me!

A bank guard was in the door, firing over my head at the sedan. The stuttering machine-gun ate across the plate glass and reached him. His partner dragged him back and slammed the grill-barred portal. Their first duty was to protect the bank.

Retreat cut off I was once more a jungle fighter, knowing I could survive only so long as I kept my head. Keeping in the shadow of a trash can, I slithered toward the car, firing carefully and picking off both the gunmen making crouched dashes for the armored car.

My clip was empty. I dropped it, shoved another into the butt and ran for the gang car. A small, white hand was reaching from the bottom of the open door. I kept going until I brought up against a front tire. "Gotta get outa here! Let's get outa here," a high-pitched voice cried from the interior.

Under the car I saw the gleam of Bucky's puttees crossing from the armored truck. Bucky had to get me—as he'd had to get Pink—regardless of the outcome of the raid.

"Damn you!" I choked again, heaving upright. The driver looked startled, seeing me come up so near to him. He died with that startled look on his toothy face and a hole in his head.

The car rocked with a shifted weight. There came one more shot from it. Something caught me high on the side and spun me into the gutter. I propped on my elbow and aimed at the man in the light coat creeping out of the wrecked sedan. His head was in the dim glow reflected from the bent headlight and it turned just as I squeezed the trigger. I recognized her at the same instant my arm jerked with the shot.

"Jerry!" I cried . . . and cried into blackness . . .

I thought another white-capped nurse was coming into my room. Then I saw it was Marcourt. He came over to the high bed.

"Feeling better today, Evans? Good. You cleaned up on 'em, boy. Gang of the toughest thugs ever came down here from the big town. You were right, too, about the inside man. Bucky Newsome. He—"

"The hell he was," I interjected.

"No? What d'you mean?"

"Not the real inside man—she was a woman. Jerry Nolan. But I got her!"

"Jerry—" Marcourt put a broad palm on my forehead. "You all right, Evans? Don't feel feverish, do you?"

I tried to sit up, but I was stiffer than a mummy. "Dammit, don't tell me she got away, Luke. But she was wounded, the double-dealing cat! Find her, Luke, get her!"

For a few minutes I lay there wondering how I could have missed that final shot. True, I was wounded, too, but she was so close, spilling out of the back of that sedan.

Marcourt entered again. "I got her, boy! Here!"

This time I managed to get halfway up, but some imp seared my side with a hot poker. Standing beside Marcourt, pale even in the pink haze of my pain-filled vision, was Jerry!

"Paul!" she said.

"But—I killed you—that gang car—"

Tears were running down her cheeks. "No, it was George. I heard him come downstairs after you left. He'd been in his room all the time. He'd heard everything, Paul! But I didn't dream— He drove away in his car. Later, I found a gun behind the hat rack in the front hall! I knew at once something terrible was happening, so I called Luke. We rushed to the bank as fast as we could . . ."

"And got there just too late," Marcourt said. "I wasn't going to mention it to you, boy, but Jerry's brother was dead. He was the fingerman for that crew of hoods, working with Bucky Newsome. He looked a lot like Jerry, maybe that's why—"

"George?" I asked. "George who?"

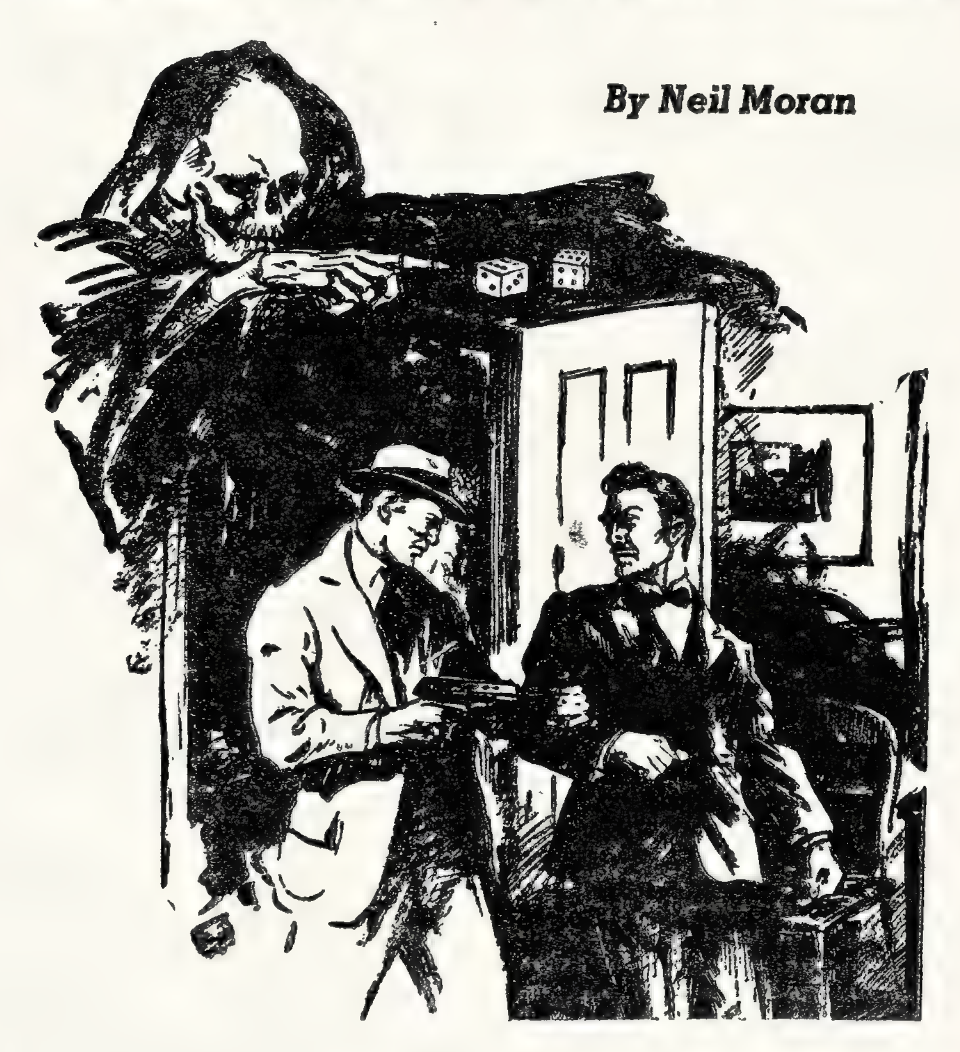
"Horn. You know—Candy Horn. You asked me who he was once." Marcourt looked puzzled.

"Why doesn't somebody tell me these things?" I said. Then, "Jerry—darling, I'm sorry. I'm—"

She came closer and put a trembling finger to my lips.

Almost invariably, criminals end up wearing stripes. But in the curious case of the big-time gambler Eddie Kerns . . .

Murder Wears a White Shirt



By Neil Moran

LOUIS ALMATO was handing out white shirts. He stood in the center of his night club, as hands reached out. There was much laughter. Louis, who had got to the bottom of the pile, said, "That's all for tonight, my friends. Come again."

The guests were still laughing as Louis went up the stairs. What an idea to advertise his club! It was called the White Shirt, and instead of handing out favors, Louis handed out white shirts.

His guests knew that he was eccentric; it would be just like Louis to do that kind of thing. But they also knew that Louis got it back in the checks. Louis wasn't losing anything, and was affording much entertainment and mirth.

The gag was to ask for a white shirt. One to a guest. Louis would make a speech, saying that white shirts were not as plentiful as blueberries, but if you paid the prices, you could get the blueberries. Broadway columnists had written him

up. Louis, who had been known to do the oddest things, had at last hit upon something that was a gem.

Going to his office, he closed the door, and looked furtively around. He could still hear the laughter, but there was no smile on his face. He had killed a man, between eight and nine o'clock tonight. He wondered if by now the police had found out.

The telephone rang and his hand shook. "Hello!" he said, lifting the receiver.

"This is Marco, Louis."

"Yes?"

"Louis, I was just in the neighborhood of Eddie Kerns' house, and there was a big crowd in front of it. The police are there. Eddie Kerns was bumped off!"

Louis tried to control his hand and steadied his voice. "Eddie Kerns murdered? Are you sure?"

"That's what people are saying. Hey, Louis, they might get you in on this. You know it was only this afternoon—"

"Don't talk over the phone, you fool. Go back and find out what you can, Marco, and call me up." He hung up the receiver, shivering, and walked up and down the room. Eddie Kerns had been murdered. Yes, he knew.

Detective Connors, who, with other detectives, had been assigned to the case, had found out about the white shirts. Kerns' man servant had told him. His story briefly was that Kerns had come home at eight o'clock and put two shirts he had been carrying into the second drawer of his dresser. After them he had put a pair of dice, and had told his man servant that Louis Almato had given him the shirts, and that he had won ten thousand dollars from Louis, gambling. Louis had paid half of it, and had promised to give him the rest next week.

The man servant had thought nothing of it, because he knew about Louis' shirts, and knew that both Louis and Kerns were big-time gamblers. But after he returned from an errand, and discovered Kerns' dead body on the floor with a bloodstained candlestick near it, a single die near that, the dresser drawer half open, and the shirts missing, he called the police.

IT was the most curious motive that Connors and the other detectives had ever worked on. A man apparently had been murdered for his two white shirts. As Connors walked toward Louis Almato's night club, he thought that Louis might have the answer.

Louis looked up as a knock came on the door. Before he could get up, Connors opened it. "Keep your seat, Louis," he said. "I just dropped in to have a little talk with you."

Louis tried to smile, offered Connors a drink. When Connors declined it, Louis offered him a white shirt.

Connors looked at him. "I don't want a white shirt," he said. "But I want to ask you about two others. This evening you were rolling dice with Eddie Kerns, and he won ten thousand dollars from you."

"That's right," said Louis. "Right here in this office. He came in and asked me if I wanted to roll dice."

"Was anyone else here?"

"Marco Withers."

"When did you discover that the game was crooked?"

Louis stared at him. "The game wasn't crooked," he said.

"Oh, yes, it was," said Connors. "Eddie was playing with a pair of loaded dice. Did you know that Eddie used to be a sleight-of-hand artist?"

"No, I never did, Connors."

Connors kept looking at him. "So Eddie took you for all that dough, and you paid him five thousand, and said that you'd give him the other five thousand next week."

"That's right," said Louis. "He must have told somebody."

"His man servant. Then the man servant went out. When he came back, Eddie's body was lying on the floor of the bedroom. and near it, a die. The shirts you gave him were gone. You don't know anything about it?"

"No," said Louis.

"About those shirts," said Connors. "Why did you give him *two* shirts?"

"He asked for two."

"Isn't the gag just to give one, to get a laugh out of it? That's as I understand this quaint way you have of doing things."

"Yes, ordinarily, but I gave Eddie two shirts. I liked him."

"I see," said Connors. "You don't like your other guests, so you just give them one shirt."

Louis sprang up. "If you got anything on me," he said, "come out with it."

"No, I haven't. But I hope to. I thought I'd just let you know, Louis, that I'm after you. I believe that you killed Eddie Kerns, and I'm out to pin it on you."

Connors went out, believing that his tactics had brought results. He was convinced now that Louis Almato had committed this murder or knew something about it. He could see it in Louis' eyes, the way Louis acted.

Stepping into the police car, Connors gave orders to be driven to one of Marco's rendezvous. Marco wasn't there, and he went to the next place. In the third place he found him, a block away from the scene of the murder, where Marco had dropped in to get a drink. When he saw Connors, he started walking toward a back door, but Connors grabbed him.

"Just a moment, Marco," he said. "I want to have a talk with you."

He walked him out, pushed him into the police car. "Now, Marco," he said, "let's get down to cases. You were in Louis Almato's office this evening, when he was gambling with Eddie Kerns. Tell me about it."

"Eddie came in and said he'd like to roll the bones. Louis obliged him. They started with a buck, but soon there were fifty dollar bills on the table."

"Each had a roll?"

"No. They were keeping track on paper. Eddie kept running it up, and kept throwing sevens. Then he'd lose the dice and Louis would take them."

"But not for long."

"No, I can see that you know that the game was crooked."

"Did you know it was crooked at the time?"

"No, but after Eddie left with his white shirts, I told Louis of my suspicions. I said that Eddie might have been switching the dice, that once he was a sleight-of-hand artist."

"Ah! You told Louis that! Go on, Marco."

"Well, that's about all. I went out of the room. I came back, and Louis was handing Eddie two white shirts, and putting him on the shoulder."

"Did you see Louis give Eddie any money?"

"Yeah, I saw him give five thousand. He said he'd give him the rest next week. That he was good for it. And Eddie laughed and threw the white shirts up into the air and caught them."

Connors looked at him, and felt that Marco had told him the truth. "Well, Marco," he said, "we're going to give you a ride down to headquarters. Just to keep you under cover for a while. We don't want Louis Almato to get near you."

IT WAS twelve o'clock when Connors stepped into the night club with several detectives and started up the stairs. Louis, who had been putting in uneasy moments, heard the tramping, and looked toward the window.

The door opened. Connors and the detectives stepped into the room.

Louis sat behind his desk, trying to act like a man who was on good terms with the world. "Oh, Connors!" he said, rising. "Back again."

"Yeah, back again," said Connors, "and I'll be brief this time. Louis, you murdered Eddie Kerns."

"It's easy to say I murdered him. What proof have you?"

"This," said Connors, taking one of a pair of dice out of his pocket, and matching it with the other. "Found it in your apartment, Louis, in a tobacco jar. You see, we know all the tricks. I figured that you wouldn't keep the die on you, or in the office. But you didn't want to throw it away. Afraid, Louis, that it might have been found. Fingerprints on it. Wide publicity given to the murder. You never know, Louis. You were playing it carefully, too carefully."

"Fingerprints," said Louis. "Bah!

You're trying to frame me! You want a conviction!"

"No, I'm not trying to frame you. Let me show you something else that will complete the case." He turned to one of the detectives and asked for the package. He unwrapped it, while Louis stared. He took out a white shirt. Louis began to tremble.

"This also was found in your apartment, under a rug. But we know all the tricks. Now, Louis, your mistake was in giving Eddie Kerns two shirts. It was a mistake, because it started a line of reasoning. Why should you have given Eddie two shirts? You said he asked for two, but he didn't. Eddie had plenty of white shirts, plenty of money. He asked for one white shirt, just for the gag in it. To get a laugh out of it.

"After Marco Withers told you that Eddie was a sleight-of-hand artist, you knew that he had thrown too many sevens. You went up the fire-escape, crawled through a window, and surprised him in the bedroom. You told him what you had learned, and demanded the white shirts, the dice and the money he had fleeced from you. He evidently refused to give them to you.

"Whether or not he grabbed the candlestick, and you got it away from him, I don't know. But you hit Eddie Kerns over the head with that candlestick and killed him. Then you heard the man servant returning, and left hurriedly, dropping one of the dice, as you rushed toward the window.

"This shirt here?" Connors held it up. "That's your handwriting on it, isn't it?"

Louis shook his head, bowed it, and slumped in the chair.

"There it is, Louis. With that quaint way you have of doing things, and something that was different, to get the old laugh, Louis, instead of using a piece of paper to write your I.O.U., you literally put it on the cuff. On the shirt cuff! And I think, Louis, that now you'll sign a confession!"

X Marks the A-Bomb

By C. M. Kornbluth

[*Continued from page* 20]

going to blow up Manchester if the accursed English didn't then give Scotland its independence.

Good gosh!

It takes all kinds of people to make a world. Did you know that there was an Irish Brigade in the army of Kaiser Wilhelm between 1916 and 1918?

The man in the officer's uniform took down some names and addresses and did some long-distance phoning from his office. I was mentioned in one of the phone calls. Like this:

"What'll we do about the reporter, General?"

Silence.

"Yes, sir. Seventeen? We could shoot him . . . yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir." *Click.*

It was ten-thirty A.M By eleven-thirty the reporters had been told to keep their mouths shut—excerpts from the Espionage Act of the Fiftieth United States Congress being read—and packed onto the train.

By noon I was on a plane that took me to an airfield under three guards. From there I went to my present location, a sandy little island well off the Atlantic coast. They do something or other here with an uranium pile; I don't know just what. I'm the timekeeper. I keep time for everybody in District Seventeen except myself, because I haven't got anything *but* time.

The guards have been informed that I get shot, preferably through the head, if I try to leave; otherwise I have the run of the place. All I'm living for is the hope that someday the United Nations will get the atomic bomb and I'll get out of District Seventeen.

Maybe I won't burn this story. Maybe I'll keep it until then.

Dead Letter Officer

"Alvin Hinkey" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

When Alvin Hinkey, the harness bull Hawkshaw, connected two loose-end skull crackings to get a spine-tingling crime circuit, he forgot to cut himself out of the hot-spot hook-up.

Mr. Louis Garfunkle, Sgt.
APO 870, San Francisco

DEAR LOUIE: Have been looking for a letter from you, but as Hambone Noonan says, how could you have time to write when you are up to your neck in black markets? Hambone says if you go shoppin' in Tokio to pick up a pair of real silk loungin' pajamas, Looie—purple if possible—as he got himself a new doll. He met her at a murder, and if you could see this blond blister, you would believe it. Which reminds me of quite a job me and Hambone turned in for the D.A.

One morning, early, I am taking a day off from pounding a beat up around Gunhill Road, and go on a busman's holiday which is like a subway guard going to the Mammoth Cave to spend a week. I visit with the boys downtown who belong to the homicide squad. We are batting our gums there when a report comes in about a corpse who has died under suspicious circumstances. The remains, it seems, looked to be nothing but a tramp, but after all, Louie, murder is murder whether the victim turns out to be a Wall Street broker or a Pell Street panhandler.

Hambone, a contemptuary named Cateye Coogan, and yours truly go up to a tenement on East Twelfth Street to look at the cadaver. He was named Otto Foody and had the smallest and cheapest room on the top floor back. Somebody has liquidated him with a firearm that is no doubt illegal.

The landlady says she cannot understand who would want to risk the hot squat to rub out such a no-good. "Why, he never had no friends or no enemies," Mrs. Mutoffnik says. "He never had more than his weekly rent money in his life, an' most always he had that a week or two late. I was goin' to evict him anyways, so this is a kind of break for me."

"It is goin' to be tough to find a motive here, Alvin," Hambone says. "But you keep your hands off things as you are no longer in plainclothes, don't forget."

"If this suit I got on ain't plain, then Karloff doubles for Charles Boyer in the casbars," I snap at him. "What was Foody doin' under the washbasin in the corner there? Did he have to fix his own plumbin'?"

Mrs. Mutoffnik says what do you know and waddles over to where I am pointing. The old carpet has been lifted up there and a couple of boards are loose.

"You think Foody might of been a crook an' hid jewels under there?" Hambone remarks to Cateye.

"He lived here five months," Mrs. Mutoffnik sniffs. "I don't remember Foody goin' out at night even oncet. He was scared in the dark. He wouldn't know a ruby from a pearl unless they was both dames. I guess nobody heard the shot as the elevated trains make a lot of racket goin' by here. Anyway the killer most likely used a maximum silencer."

It looks like one of those murders, Louie, that won't get solved. I am glad I am not stuck with the case. Hambone gets down on his knees and lifts up the boards under the washstand. Believe it or not he finds something and not a cockroach. It is a gummed wrapper that you see around bunches of moolah in the banks. On it is printed, *Chelsea Title & Trust.*

"So he wasn't a crook, ha?" Hambone yelps. "Then little elfs or lepercorns stashed some lettuce here. There is a date on this label, Alvin. February, 1939. He stole a hunk of currency that time an' has been livin' off it ever since. Who said crime don't pay?"

"So he was a dumb bum, huh?" Cateye says. "He never put on no dog, so the cops never suspected him. Well, we'll check on his prints, Noonan, an' see if he's got a record."

"You tryin' to tell me how to run my business?" Hambone snaps. "I'm in charge here."

THE appraiser of the defunct persons arrives and apologizes for being tardy. "I had to go get my bag. Left it in Rita's place—er—my niece, ha, ha. So that's the corpse there, huh?"

"No, no," Noonan says. "That's Alvin Hinkey. Alvin, stop dozin' off."

The examiner says Foody has been extinct for about nine hours. A .32 calibre slug has passed through his skull in the region of the *tentorium cerebelli.*

"Tell us how he died in English," I says.

"Nine hours!" Mrs. Mutoffnik exclaims quite horrified. "Get him out of here!"

We ransack the hall room to find nothing to prove the loser led a double life. We learn that Otto last worked for the D. D. & T. Exterminator Co.

I find spots under the washstand, Louie. "That looks like blood," I says. "The criminal person punctured a finger with one of the nails on that board he lifted up, huh? See if the corpse did it."

Otto's fingers are quits woundless. Hambone says the spots could have been there for at least three days. "Maybe Otto cut himself shavin'," he sniffs. "There is a nick on his chin. He—!" He grabs at Mrs. Mutoffnik who right away gets down on her knees and wipes up the spots. Too late.

"Tsk-tsk," I says.

"What's all the squawk?" Mrs. Mutoffnik yelps. "You think I can rent a room with blood in it? You can't tell whose blood is which anyway as I read in a detective story magazine you couldn't."

Hambone sighs and mops his pan with his sleeve. "I guess it was nothin', Alvin. We better go downtown an' have them check on the stiff there. Where's the stiff sedan?"

There is no record of Otto having been a dishonest character. His prints are not on file. There isn't a flatfoot in the big town who remembers ever having seen Otto. But when Hambone Noonan checks with the brass at the Chelsea Title and Trust, they trace back and show us where one of their messengers was bopped in 1939 and relieved of a leather reticule containing almost thirty thousand fish.

Cateye Coogan snaps his fingers. "I remember that job, Hambone. They slugged the runner coming out of a subway. One of the crooks was recognized by a citizen before he scrammed. Don't you remember, Noonan? The witness told the cops he listened to all them Crook Buster programs on the radio an' read all the detective story mags like they was religion. He was sure the crook with the droopy left eyelid and ribbon-clerk mustache was—what was his name? The D. A. will tell us."

"An' the cops picked up the honest citizen to protect him an' tossed him in jail," I says, nodding. "They did not let him loose until the cops had raided a joint on the West Side and knocked off two of the messenger hijackers."

"I was thinkin' of that all the time," Hambone says. "Alvin, don't forget you are only a harness bull walkin' a beat on the moors. If we want your advice we'll ast fer it."

Well, we get a load of the old case downtown about an hour later. The cops said the case was closed after Droopeye Duggy and Fungo Glipp had been rubbed out. Of course, neither one of the gees had been able to confess where the take was cached, as even at that time, the D.A. had not put a spiritualist on the payroll.

"That was a mistake, of course," the D.A. tells us. "They should have took at least one of the hoods alive. It looks like one of the crooks had a room at Mrs. Mutoffnik's house at the time, just to stash the dough in an'—why—how would this guy Otto Foody know that? I'll bet he was an accessory with Glipp and Droopeye Duggy. He got away."

"You sure are on the old ball today, D.A.," Hambone says. "That sure is figgerin'."

"I don't see how you do it," I sniff. "So Otto was like a pheasant who flies away quick when the hunters come so that they will chase her instead of her chicks. What a break for him Droopeye and Fungo was shot. But what became of all the thirty grand? And who would know Foody had it there?'

"Listen, Hinkey!" the D.A. says. "If we knew everythin' we wouldn't have to keep a police force! Noonan, it is up to you to find all the rest out."

"Come on, Cateye," Hambone says to Coogan. "We can't git no moss if we don't roll some stones. Alvin, you keep out of this."

"I'll be very happy to," I says.

I AM walking my beat up near Gunhill the next night when a sprout rushes up to me and says for me to come quick as his ma has found something terrible.

"Your old man boiled in a tavern, huh?" I sniff. "First it is a cat I got to git down out of a tree, then it is a kid with its noggin stuck between the bars of its crib. Now I got to help somebody git a stewbum out of—awright, show me the way, Buster!"

I follow the kid three blocks, Louie. We come to a fair-to-middling apartment house close to 207th Street and go upstairs three flights. In front of an open door is a fat dame wringing her hands. "Well, what's the rhubarb?" I snaps at her.

"Come quick, Officer," she says. "This is awful."

She was not kidding. I go into a two-room apartment and spy a nicely clad character of about thirty years sprawled out on the floor near a studio couch. He is not drunk and is not asleep but very dead. Somebody has bashed him over the noggin with something heavier than a chocolate bar.

"Where's the telephone?" I ask. "This is for the homicide squad."

After I call the Bronx finest, I go

back into the room and look around, touching nothing, of course. I quiz the dame. She is a housewoman and says the corpse is named Eddie Prawn. She says Prawn was quite a man about town and wrote a column for a Bronx paper. It was called Prawn's Personalities.

"I've seen it," I says. "There is more dirt in it than there is over at the dump. Well, somebody caught up with the jerk, huh? At least four dozen citizens had a right to fix his wagon."

"But who?"

"Maybe somebody like that blonde there over on the table," I says. "The pitcher of the chickadee, of course. Who is she? Looks kind of familiar."

"She's been here a couple of times," the dame says. "I don't know her name."

"It'll be around somewheres," I says. "She looks like she weighs about a hundred pounds soakin' wet. She couldn't never punch her way out of a paper bag to say nothing of her havin' cracked a noggin as tough as Prawn's looks. Lot of murders around lately, aren't there?"

The Bronx dicks arrive, and so does the cadaver analyst. Prawn has been dead for two hours at least. The cops finecomb the two rooms and come up with a flock of addresses and telephone numbers.

"Of course he would have them," I observe. "The line of business he was in—"

"Yeah," a cop says. "It would take us six days to call all these numbers. When we got through what would we have? This character had more enemies than Franco. He made a dozen a day with his lousy column. Well, I wonder if a doll bit him before she slugged him. Got a bandage around his finger."

I look down at the stiff, and my heart starts pounding like a sheriff's fist on a bankrupt's door. Maybe it was just coincidence, sure. Ha!

"Not a clue nowheres," a flatfoot gripes. "I'd like to meet up with one of them detective story writers! Well, let's begin on the blond babe there. She's a special or wouldn't be framed on his table."

He picks up the photo. On the bottom there is some writing that says, *To my darling Eddie, from your Yola. Alway and always. Love.*

"Mush," a cop sniffs. "Well, look up this Yola in the book there, Benny. Git her address an' we'll go an' grill her. Looks like this is a two-timin' deal."

We find out the blond dish's full name is Yola Hubber, and that she lives in a pueblo just four blocks away. I lay the address away inside my skull, Louie, and go back to pounding the beat for another hour.

Two murders and I got no cut in either one! I keep thinking of the bandage on Eddie Prawn's finger, but figure there must be about eight or nine thousand people a day in this city gettin' their fingers cut some way or another. How would Prawn get connected with a bum like Otto Foody? There was no sense in my thinking, so I forget about it.

I turn a corner quick and bump into a taxpayer who has just emerged from a tavern. "Why, if it ain't Chipso Welky," I says. "When did you git out?"

"Hiya, Hinkey," Chipso says. "Couple days ago, pal. Lemme tell you I'm finished wit' the illegit. I'm cured, Flatfoot. Never ag'in. It's the straight an' narrer fer Ol' Chipso. I've learned me lesson, Hink. I ain't holdin' no hard feelin's against you an' Noonan fer handin' me the rap on that fillin' station job. Say, how is that big slob?"

'Same old Noonan," I says. "Well, you keep your nose clean, Chipso."

Yeah, you get to know a lot of ruffians while you are on the force, Louie. You should know. I guess you didn't remember Chipso Welky. A penny-ante operator who always thought a hundred bucks was a burglar's bonanza. I think he did about three years.

WHEN I get to my rooming house, Hambone Noonan calls up. "Thought you'd be interested, Alvin," the big lemonhead barks. "We got a lead on the Foody case. We located that witness of the old bank job. He says he was sure there was a third party mixed up in it, an' was most likely Otto. Somebody got wise he was an'—well, I'm not tellin' you everythin'. Thought I'd call to cheer

you up, Alvin. After all you've been my prodigy an' I ain't give up on you. Just do your time in the sticks for a while longer, an' I'll keep after the D.A. to give you a lift."

"Your kindness is almost too much for me, Hambone," I snap. "How will I get to do somethin' big out here so's I can get promoted back to a detective?"

"You got me there, pal," Hambone says. "Just remember what I've taught you about not overlookin' little details. Why, a pair of dice you snatch from the sprouts out there might've belonged to Arnold Rothstein once. Well, so long, Alvin."

I slam the receiver on the hook. It would be Noonan's luck just to solve the Foody fadeout by accident as you can't keep jabbin' a thread at a hole in a needle and not get it through sometime. I am about deciding to quit the police force when I fall asleep.

Something happens the next night around ten P.M. I am over to the bastille peeling off the monkey suit when I hear some cops talking about a hair-pull they had been called in to squelch at an address that sounded quite familiar to me.

"Were them two babes goin' at it when we got there? Wow! The black-haired wench was ahead on points a little when we broke in. The blonde had a mouse under her eye, and one of her ears was a little shredded. Oh, Brother!"

"What was their names?" I asks casually.

"Huh? Oh, hello, Hinkey. Yola somethin' or other, and a thrip named Imogene. We was goin' to lock 'em up, but we find this Imogene is the sole support of a widowed mother an' was a WAC in the war, so—"

"What was the brawl about?" I ask.

"They wouldn't tell us," the cop said. "Most likely over a guy. Well, the blonde give us each a snort of nice hootch an' we went out after tellin' them they would each get a year if they disturbed the peace again. Let's see, that brunette is named Imogene LaLune. What a lousy break for Prawn, huh? Him bein' on display in a mournin' manse, with this goin' on? This Imogene sings at Tony Fuccia's place on Fordham Road."

Next morning I call up a detective and ask him to look up Imogene LaLune in Prawn's little red book. He says she is listed and why do I want to know?

"After all," I says. "I'm a cop an' want to help all I can. Nobody seems to have got nowhere with two murders in one week, so if I get any dope on Prawn's dames, I'll let you know."

Now, that evening, after my stint is done, I go over to Tony Fuccia's and listen to this Imogene sing. She has a frog in her throat and the low tones get you somehow. I get hold of Tony and tell him who I am and that I have to talk to the warbler. He gets a little flunky to show me where her dressing room is. I am sitting in the six-by-eight when LaLune slinks in. "Well, what do you want? Who let you in here?"

"The boss," I says. "I am a cop. Seems like that blonde is goin' around sayin' things about you an' Eddie Prawn. Oh, what she calls you—"

"That peroxided hunk of tripe!" Imogene fairly screeches. "I told her to lay off or I'd—look, she might be kiddin' the cops but not me!" Imogene sits down, lights a cigarette, and pours it on. "I happen to know she's two-timed more guys than you can count on a centipede's feet. Glamor gal, huh? She started out by bein' the torch for a lousy crook named Chalky White. Eddie Prawn told me. He knew everythin' about every dame in this part of town.

"Well, Chalky gets grabbed in a holdup on the West Side, and he gets two to three years. What does that babe do but cross him up right away. Then she takes up with Eddie, but when he sees me, she is a dead mouse. She had reason to kill him and I'll bet she did!"

"Chalky White," I says. "Hmm, I recall the tough boy. A couple of months ago, maybe a little more, I remember somethin' happened to him up in the big house. What was it now?"

"She said she'd get Eddie," Imogene snaps. "That tramp! If I loved a guy and he went to jail, I'd stick just the same. You cops must be thicker than I always

thought. Get the goods on that washed-out moll!"

LOUIE, I go downtown the next morning and consult with certain citizens. I learn that Chalky White died in the infirmary and not St. James', but Sing Sing's. Still, I am going around in circles, but wait!

It is always dynamite when you play one dame against another. I call at Yola's little flat and tell her that Imogene is saying terrible things about her, one of which is that she rubbed out Eddie Prawn. "Did you?" I ask her. It is no wonder her name is Hubber, Louie. You should have seen her in the housecoat.

"That little gravel-throated buzzard!" Yola howls. "I'll carve myself a piece of her torso if she—!"

"Chalky White. He died, huh?" I inquire.

Yola nods. She grabs herself a stiff drink, but don't offer me one. She says, "I got a letter from him a year ago saying he figured he wouldn't last out his rap!" She takes another hefty snort and I waited.

"He was goin' to send me a note tipping me off to somethin' if he figured he wouldn't make it. That was Chalky. He always figured to see I was well-heeled. But he's dead, and I did not get any note. But somethin' happened that's got me nuts!" She takes a third belt and I see her eyes cross a little.

"Go on," I says. "I am a pal."

"Well, I am out one afternoon, and Eddie Prawn comes here. I had to go out quick to see about some nylons and I told him to wait. When I get back, the guy is gone. The elevator boy tells me a man came to see me. Not Eddie. He knew Eddie. The guy said he'd leave an envelope under my door. But there wasn't one there. I don't get it. The elevator boy saw the letter in the guy's hand."

"Eddie Prawn was a gossip columnist," I says. "It was his business to get the dirt wherever and whenever he could. Maybe he gobbled up the letter. If it happened to be from Chalky White, why—"

"Yeah!" Yola tosses a bottle behind the couch. "And that louse maybe found out about some dough Chalky had somewhere and—why, the stinker! Of all the breaks I git—"

My ears are full of little bells, Louie. There is a buzzer inside my noggin, and I have not even had a drop of hard stuff. I says in a faraway voice, "Maybe the elevator guy got a good description of the visitor."

Yola hiccups, quickly snaps a partial plate back in place, and nods. "Short and fat. Had a tin ear and a little scar on the side of his nose."

The buzzers fill my dome. The room goes round and round. Who fits that inventory? Chipso Welky! He's just out of the big house. He most likely knew Chalky White quite well. I do not hang around any longer, but stagger out of there.

"You cheap flatfoot," Yola says. "Drink up all my scosh an' walk out. Go ahead, an' drop dead when you walk down sthairs! Hic!"

It is fantastic. There is a link between the Foody slaying and the Prawn liquidation. I go over to the precinct house and pull on my blues. I pound a beat until nine P.M., then get back into civvies again and amble over to a certain tavern. I am there for almost an hour. After my seventh beer, Chipso walks in. The character nods pleasantly and asks for a brand of jolt syrup that retails at close to seventy cents a throw.

"Times are gettin' good, huh?" I remarks. "Most citizens are finding it hard to live the way they have been accustomed these days, Chipso. Inflation, black markets, and such."

"Look, I been away a long time. I get three bucks, I spend it silly, Hinkey," the crook says. "Try gettin' locked up fer about three years. You won't figger nothin's too good for you when you git out. Hows about havin' a slug?"

"I am on a beer diet," I says. "I guess you got some fun and extravagance comin', Chipso. Ha! Well, go easy on the stuff."

"You bet, Pal."

I GO out and duck into a dark doorway half a block away. I wait almost an hour until Chipso emerges from the gin mill. I tail him uptown for seven blocks, then see him duck into a cheap flop with a sign that says, *Hotel Iola.*

I go into the joint five minutes later and walk up to the little lobby on the second floor. A puffy and oily citizen is at the desk reading *Super-Mystery Comics.* "What room is Welky in?" I asks just as if nothing was on my mind save Hambone Noonan.

"Twen'y seven," the sloppy gee growls and goes back to the adventures of his favorite ghoul.

I go up and rap on the door. Chipso calls out, "Who is it?"

"Hinkey," I says.

Chipso looks wary as I break into his little room. "What you want to see me for, huh?'

"What would I want to see you about, Chipso?" I counter. "It sure wouldn't be to ast for a contribution from you for the choir boys' rest camp. Did you, by any chance, happen to be Chalky White's cellmate up at the big house?"

"Sure," Chipso says, and slumps down on the bed. "So what?"

"Well, Chalky has a dame named Yola. He sent her a note by a pal just before he gasped his last breath," I says. "You slid it under the doll's door or handed it to a guy named Eddie Prawn to give to her. But you was curious, Chipso, and knew what was in it before you delivered it, huh? Steamed it open perhaps? You had lots of time.

"Seein' that the cops was told there was a third crook in on the holdup of the Chelsea Title an' Trust messenger, I was thinkin' lately it might have been Chalky."

"You're nuts, Hinkey!" Chipso says. "Me, sneakin' a look at a letter from a cellmate to his doll? Why—"

"Yeah, you would do anythin', Chipso, to make a dishonest dollar," I snap at him "You rubbed out Foody—er—no, you couldn't have as it was Prawn cut his finger on the nail in the boards under the washstand—you rubbed out Prawn!"

"You can't never prove it!" Chipso yowls. I see he is as guilty as a wolf with wool in its teeth.

"No? Well, you most likely have got that thirty grand right here in this room somewhere, you big crook!" I says. "All we cops have to do is get a search warrant. I'll call them right away!"

Chipso says, "You won't call nobody, Hinkey!" He whips a Betsy out from under his pillow. I remember I left mine back in the precinct house. That was smart, huh, Louie?

"I bet you're the only one knows this," Chipso snarls at me. "Too bad, Hinkey, as I liked you a little bit! No, I ain't goin' to shoot you as it makes a noise. I just pulled the gat to see if you got a gun. Step over here and turn around. If you make one yell, it is good-by forever. Huh, you ain't heeled. Are you stupid!"

"Looks like it," I gulp out. "I guess you'll cave in my dome like you caved in Prawn's, Chipso?"

"Nice guessin', Hinkey," Welky says. "Thirty grand, all mine. Too bad. Start movin' across the room there as I must get that bottle on the radiator. It'll be quick, Hinkey! Thirty grand! Fer that much cabbage, I'd murder all my own relatives."

I guess Chipso's eyes were not as good as they were once, and that the jailhouse rusted his wits a little. The string hanging down from the light cord brushes my pan.

I yank the cord quick. Everything goes as black as the inside of a raven. Chipso empties the Betsy as I make a dive. I head the bullets chip into the floor not more than six inches from my cowlick. I let out a cry of pain, groan, and play possom.

Chipso bends over me, and I reach up and give him the old heave-ho. He flies against the door and goes out into the hall with it and bounces off the wall. A fire pail slips off a hook and comes down and settles quite firmly over his noggin. It is one of the shortest fights with a crook I ever remember, Louie.

All the flea-traps open up and lodgers pour out into the hall. "Call the cops!" I yelp, and pick up a fire axe. I whang the blade of it over the fire pail. Chipso gets

quite as limp as a string of boiled spaghetti.

WHEN the cops get there, I have them ransack Room 27 After a half hour search, they find close to thirty grand distributed throughout the lining of a reversible topcoat Chipso has hanging in the closet.

When I get over to the bastille, I call up Hambone Noonan. He has just come in from the movies. "Never mind the Foody case," I says. "It was solved along with the Prawn rub-out, Hambone. It was Prawn who got stuck with a nail in Foody's room. Come on uptown and look at the guy I caught. Prawn killed Foody. Then—well, come on up and hear the rest."

"If this is a rib, Alvin—"

"If it is, you can fracture my clavicle," I retort.

Hambone Noonan and Cateye Coogan are present when Chipso makes a detailed confession, with a stenog handy.

"Yeah, when Chalky give me the note to take to his moll, I figured there might be somethin' hot in it, as once or twice, he talked in his sleep and mentioned a name. Like Hinkey here guessed, I steamed the letter open. It told where thirty grand was hid. Then I says to myself, I'll play it smart, and let the doll or her boy friend risk gettin' by the guy who had that room rented an' get the stuff. Anyways, I figured maybe I was bein' tailed, just out of stir.

"So I cased that dame's apartment and watched Prawn come out. I followed him to where he lived. Sure enough, that night, he leaves his place about eleven P.M. I was waiting for him when he got back. I stuck a Betsy in his ribs an' we went inside. Yeah, he had the thirty grand. He'd crossed Chalky's dame. I thanked him for gittin' it for me an' crocked him!"

"It is fantastic, ain't it, Hambone?" I ask.

Cateye Coogan puts his cigar on the table and tries to light his fountain pen.

"Dolls, Noonan," I says. "When they are after the same meal ticket, they can sure mix things up. You should of worn false whiskers when you delivered that billy doo from the big house, Chipso."

"You can't think of everythin', Hinkey," Welky sighs. "Just because Chalky's torch is two-timin' him, I get caught on a perfect setup. Prawn gets the dough fer me and knocks off the roomer an' I'm in the clear—an' then—look, how did it happen again?"

"Crime never pays," I says.

"Why wasn't Noonan patrollin' your beat?" Chipso yelps. "I'd still be sittin' on velvet. The breaks I git!"

"I resent that!" Hambone chokes out. "Alvin, you're ungrateful. You could have cut me in on this."

"You wouldn't have believed it," I says.

Well, Louie, the D.A. says I will most likely be put back on the force as a detective before I know it.

Your pal, *Alvin.*



Cache and Carry

By Pat Parker

Giving the neighbors a helping hand is all very well sometimes, but this time was decidedly—and unpleasantly—different.



I PRIDE myself on being able to size folks up. Being a wife that believes my place is in my home, I get plenty of time to study my neighbors. Take that little Mrs. Rich across the street, just going on the way she got herself up, a person might have figured she wasn't all she ought to be. But I knew the poor thing was only trying to hide her unhappiness from the world. Like I said to John, one morning at breakfast:

"It's a plumb shame, the way Mr. Rich neglects that nice little wife of his." Naturally, John being a man and a mite more manlike than most, I wasn't looking for any real understanding from him—and I didn't get any.

"What d'you expect?" he grunted through his oatmeal. "Guy's busy. Got to earn those fur coats of hers, don't he?"

"Lot of use she's got for a fur coat. Take a look!" I happened to glance out the window right then, and there was Mrs. Rich coming out of her house, lugging a big bundle. Way she had it wrapped with heavy brown paper and lots of cord, I could tell she was figuring to send it express. "Looks like that selfish husband of hers would leave her the car for the heavy hauling jobs, doesn't it? You got time to drive her to the express office, John, if you get right along."

Like I say, John's a man. Been me, I couldn't have set there, guzzling oatmeal and reading the paper, knowing that frail little woman was having to walk six blocks to the bus line, fairly staggering under the weight of that heavy bundle.

Next day, when I was starting out to market, she was coming down her front walk with another package. She never was what you'd call a neighborly person, but that's another thing I pride myself on—not hanging back when I see a chance to be helpful. I hustled right across the street.

"Morning, lady." Close up, I could see, for all the rouge and lipstick, the poor little thing was looking mighty peaked. "How about me carrying your bundle a piece?"

"Oh, no thanks. I'm used to carrying bundles." She smiled up at me, a pitiful little smile, and hugged the package up tight in her arms.

But when I get my mind set to help a person, I won't be stopped. I just lifted the bundle out of her arms. It was so heavy, I come near dropping it, and she made a quick grab to save it.

"It—it might break," she explained. "It's got glass in it—preserves."

"Some of your own canning, Mrs. Rich?"

"Yes. I—I'm sending 'em for a gift to Mr. Rich's folks upstate."

I declare it made me want to cry, that brave little thing working away in her lonely kitchen putting up preserves for the kinfolk of that no-account husband of hers. I went clean out of my way to put her safe aboard the bus with her bundle.

I was mighty glad I'd done it, too, when a few days later she landed in the hospital with a nervous breakdown. Seems her good-for-nothing husband finally did what I figured all along he was fixing to do—walked out on her. Just started for work one morning, and nobody'd set eyes on him since.

OF COURSE, the second I heard the news, I set right out for the hospital to see what I could do for the poor thing. Only the nurse in charge wouldn't let me into her room. But, like I say, I pride myself on seeing things through. Opposition only makes me more determined, so I went over to police headquarters to get an order from the chief, my old friend Jeremiah Styles.

"What do you know about Mrs. Rich, Hannah?" he asked me, while he was making out the order.

"Just about everything there is to know. She's lived right across the street from me for most a year, and you know, Jeremiah, I'm one that prides myself on using the eyes the Lord gave me."

"Did she talk much about her husband?"

"She wasn't much for talking to her neighbors. Didn't want to let on to 'em about how mean her husband treated her, I suppose."

"You feel though, that in spite of his meanness, she was a devoted wife?"

"They don't come any more devoted," I assured him. "Why, right while he was off gallivanting—most likely with some other woman—she was slaving away putting up jams and such to send off to his folks. I helped her carry 'em to the express office. Her being such a little thing, it was plumb cruel to let her carry those big, heavy bundles."

"Hannah!" Jeremiah jumped up, grabbed hold of both my hands and squeezed 'em. "Hannah, you're my idea of a really helpful woman."

"I pride myself on doing what I can, Jeremiah," I told him, wishing John could be there to hear him praising me for being helpful. Ever since I've been married to John, he's been telling me to mind my own business; folks, he keeps saying, don't appreciate strangers trying to help 'em.

Maybe, seeing how me trying to help Mrs. Rich turned out, maybe he's right, at that!

Of course, I don't pay a mite of attention to John's jokes; but there is one thing that's really got me bothered—just which portion of that no-account Mr. Rich was in the bundle *I* lugged the six blocks to the bus line?



Claim Your Own Dead

By Ric Hasse



The Samaritan who put Larry Cole aboard the Chicago train and helped him to a hotel room wasn't really a philanthropist. For there was a fee that Larry would have to pay for these kind services—a slight charge of murder.

THE NOSE was a monstrosity. The nose was a nose that Cyrano de Bergerac would have been proud to call his own. It was huge and long, and the end bulged and was full of oversized pores that made it look like an under-ripe strawberry. The sun streaming through the window reflected from one half of the face behind the nose and cast two parallel shadows across the other half; the second shadow created by a big black cigar.

Larry Cole dropped his eyelids again.

He screwed up his face and turned his head slowly as far as it would go, to the right, then to the left.

"Our drinking is like our sins," the Nose said. "Sooner or later we must pay for it. Yet, if this Grape be a Curse, Who then put it there, eh?"

Cole opened his eyes again and stared around him and groaned. He was on a moving train. In a coach car. Cole was not in the mood to hear misquotations from Omar Khayyam, not when he was facing the unpleasant consequences of a five-day drinking spree. He frowned at the man in the seat across from him. The Nose grinned around his cigar and dropped a well-manicured hand on Cole's knee.

"How do you feel, m'boy?"

"Lousy," Cole said.

The Nose took the cigar from his mouth and chuckled.

"Don't mind me. Another man's hang-over is always good for a laugh."

Larry Cole's frown deepened. He moved his lips and tongue trying to work the dryness out of his mouth. His eye-balls ached. The man with the nose hoisted himself from his seat.

"What you need, m'boy, is a bromo."

He moved down the swaying car and returned with a paper cup of water in each hand. He gave the cups to Cole and poured a one-dose package of activated bromo into one cup. Cole drank the foaming mixture gratefully.

"Do you know how I got on this train? The last I remember, I was talking to a guy in a bar in Washington, D. C. I was telling him about my girl."

"I was there," the Nose chuckled. "Before you passed out, you said you were going to take the next train to Chicago to see her. So, I brought you along with me. You've had a long sleep. We'll be in Chicago in a few minutes."

"My baggage?"

"Your hand bag is on the rack right over you, and here's the baggage check for your duffle bag."

Cole nodded. He hadn't gotten around to buying any luggage yet. All he'd bought so far was a couple of shirts, a pair of shoes, the new grey suit he was wearing, and the binge he'd been promising himself for four years.

"I don't know how to thank you, sir. I know that taking care of a lush is no fun."

The Nose leaned over and touched a shiny fingertip to the gold button on Cole's lapel.

"You deserve anything anyone can do for you, m'boy," he said almost piously. "Say, have you a place to stay when you get to Chicago?"

Cole shook his head.

"I'll get a room in a hotel for a couple of days. Then I think I'll be getting married, unless Julie's changed her mind."

"Well, all the hotels are pretty crowded, but I think I can help you out. I have a reservation at the Parker House, but I have to go on to Milwaukee right away, and won't be using the room. So you go there and use my name. They won't know the difference."

The train was slowing for the Sixty-third Street, Englewood station and the man with the nasal prominence stood up and reached over his head to pull a pig-skin suitcase from the luggage rack.

"You go to the Parker House, m'boy, and tell them that you're Bernard Arendel. They'll take care of you."

He waved aside Cole's thanks and followed his huge nose down the aisle.

LARRY COLE'S skin still retained a good portion of its Pacific tan, and it felt good to him under a fine needle spray in the white-tiled shower. His head still ached dully, and his mouth was still dry, but he was getting hungry and that was a good sign. The housing plan had worked like a charm.

From the moment he had scrawled, *Bernard Arendel,* on the Parker House's register card, it had been, "Yes, Mr. Arendel. . . . Of course, Mr. Arendel. . . . We'll be glad to pick up your baggage for you, Mr. Arendel. . . . Anything you want, just call on us, Mr. Arendel."

Then he'd called up Julie at the County Building where she worked and told her he was here. Her voice had been the best pickup possible. Her voice had sound-

ed like sweet music. Even half-laughing, half-sobbing.

"Larry! Larry, darling! Where are you? I'll be right over! No, I won't wait for quitting time; I'm coming right now! Meet me in the lobby. Oh, darling, it's wonderful to hear you. It's good!"

He was towelling his lean brown body when the tap came at the door of his room.

"Boy with your baggage, sir."

Cole stuck his head out of the bathroom and called.

"Bring it in and toss it down anywhere."

He heard the outer door open and a sharp thud, then the bellhop wanting to know if he should open the baggage.

"Don't bother," Cole called. "There's nothing in it that I want right now. Take a quarter from the dresser."

He slipped into a pair of clean shorts and went into his bedroom. The bellhop was gone, but instead of the half-filled Army duffle bag that Cole expected to see, there was a four-foot steamer trunk. He stood for a minute just staring at it. It was an expensive trunk, with leather bound corners and a strong lock. And on the front it was initialled, *B. A.* in gold letters.

He walked over to the phone beside the bed, then stopped before he even reached for it. The initial on the trunk were the same as the ones he was using right now. He went back to the trunk and looked at the baggage tag on it. It bore the same numbers as the baggage check he'd left at the desk downstairs. Then he laughed. It was obvious. His long-nosed Good Samaritan on the train had simply given him the wrong check. When Mr. Arendel discovered the mistake, he'd come and make an exchange.

Cole finished dressing, stood before the mirror to knot his necktie. On the glass-topped dresser were the odds and ends from his trouser pockets. In the middle of the little group of coins was a bronze key. He had never seen it before. Cole didn't own anything with a lock on it. He picked it up and turned it over in his fingers. On impulse, he stepped to the strange trunk and slipped the key into the lock slot. It turned smoothly, with barely a click.

Cole put his hands on the front of the trunk and spread it open about twelve inches. Twelve inches was plenty. The usual drawers and hangers had been removed from the inside of the luggage, but the trunk was full. The man must have been small, but even so his body filled all the space. The round bald head with the black hole in it fell forward against the opening as if the corpse were trying to stick his wrinkled, cadaverous face out into the air.

He walked numbly over to the bed and sat down on the edge. He tried to think but his head began to ache and spin again. The bellhop who brought the trunk up hadn't seen him, he'd been out of sight in the bathroom. The desk clerk had given him a lot of attention, but had been very busy, distracted, and probably wouldn't be able to identify him. Let the trunk stay here.

He locked the trunk, threw the key under the bed, grabbed his little rubberized canvas handbag. He walked down two flights before he took the elevator.

In crossing the lobby from the elevator to the street door, Cole would have to pass within a few feet of the room desk, but the clerk was busy saying no to a little line of room seekers. Cole kept his eyes straight ahead of him and started in a direct line to the lobby door.

He was almost past the desk when he saw her. She was leaning across the hotel desk with her back turned to him, trying to attract the room clerk's attention, but Cole caught a glimpse of her profile. Four years hadn't changed her. She looked the same as she had forty-eight months ago on his last furlough. The same pert little nose, full lips. She used to wear her hair piled on top of her head. Now it tumbled in soft waves around her shoulders, but it was the same hair, the color of fresh, golden honey.

He opened his mouth to call to her, then stopped with his mouth still gaping when he saw the bellhop beside her. And what the bellhop was carrying.

Then he had pushed through the revolving doors and was hurrying down

State Street. He didn't know where he was going, but he kept walking. The bellhop had been carrying an Army duffle bag, with *Laurence E. Cole* stenciled on the side in big black letters.

BEHIND him he heard someone call his name, but it didn't penetrate his mind. The sounds of traffic in the street, the taxi horns, clashing gears, the swish of passing cars, the thunder of the elevated a block over on Wabash, the rapid tattoo of a woman's heels running on the pavement behind him. His ears picked it all up, but he didn't hear it. He was walking mechanically, in a straight line, his eyes staring, unseeing, ahead of him. He shouldered into a couple of people, but didn't even pause.

Then there was a soft hand on his sleeve, a quiet, anxious voice beside him:

"Larry! Larry, what's the matter? You saw me in the hotel lobby and didn't stop. Why?"

He kept walking, didn't look at her, and she had to take fast little steps to keep up with him.

"Larry! Darling, what's wrong?"

This time when he didn't answer, she stopped dead still with her feet planted solidly on the sidewalk and grabbed his arm with both hands. His own momentum swung him around to face her. Her blue eyes crinkled up and sparks lit up beneath the surface. Her voice was low, and rapid, and angry.

"Look, Larry, if you've changed your mind, okay! But say so! We agreed four years ago that if either of us changed, we'd call the whole thing off. But I want to know, one way or the other! You don't have to give me this silent treatment. Do you think I'll cause trouble and cry and scream? You should know me better than that! If you don't love me any more, if you don't want me, tell me now; and maybe I'll cry and scream, but not where you can see me."

He just stood there, silent, with a dazed look on his face. The girl gripped her full underlip between her teeth and swung her arm. Her fingers left four strips of red across his cheek.

"For heaven's sake, Larry! Say something!"

He put a hand to his cheek and the blank glaze left his eyes and he really looked at her. Then the words she had spoken finally began sinking into his brain. A few passers-by were standing at a little distance watching the scene curiously. A tall uniformed policeman was hurrying toward them.

A sob stuck in Cole's throat. He dropped his canvas bag, caught the girl in his arms, and held her close.

"Julie, Julie, Julie," he breathed over and over, his face buried in her silken hair.

"What's going on here?" the cop wanted to know, loudly.

A cab driver parked at the curb stuck his head through the window of his hack and said, "It was a lover's quarrel, copper, but it's too late for you to do anything about it now."

Cole twisted his head, saw the cop, and his eyes grew frightened, frantic. But the law didn't notice. "What's the matter with you two?" he asked.

Julie's laugh was light and happy and almost gay. "It's all right, officer," she sparkled. "We just became engaged again."

The cop put the backs of his hands on his hips belligerently. "Well, you can't do it here on the public thoroughfare! Take it home."

Cole picked up his bag. He grabbed the girl's hand and dragged her over to the taxicab, pushed her inside. The cop was laughing when the cab started. Julie was laughing too, but there were tears in her eyes at the same time. She took Cole's face between the palms of her hands and kissed him.

"You'll never know how much you worried me back there, you big lug," she smiled tenderly. "What was the big idea anyway?"

THE grinning driver wanted to know if they were going anywhere in particular. Cole looked at the girl and she whispered an Oak Street address, near Washington Square. Cole just told the driver to go to the Square. He closed

the glass panel behind the front seat, then reached for Julie's hand. She was looking at him with a proud smile on her face.

"Julie, I'm in a jam," he told her. "I think somebody has me framed for a murder!"

The smile faded from her face. Her lips parted and she covered them with the fingers of one hand. Her other hand clutched at his.

"Murder! Who?"

He shook his head. In low quick tones he told her about his binge; waking up on the train; his huge-nosed, supposedly Good Samaritan; the trunk key in his pocket; the bald-headed corpse; his decision to ease out of the picture, only to find his duffle bag being sent to his room. By the time he had finished, the color had drained from her face, leaving it white and cold, with only two spots of red high on her cheekbones.

The taxi pulled up on State Street, across from Washington Square. Cole paid the driver, and they got out. She showed him the direction to her apartment.

"Larry, what are we going to do?" her voice was choked, scared. "Your story sounds fantastic!" They turned into Oak Street and hurried to her apartment.

It was a nice apartment. Living room, bedroom, and kitchen, with a tiny foyer. Cole looked around at the rose-painted walls and nodded approvingly.

"It's too big for just me," she told him, "but apartments are hard to get now, and I wanted to be sure of having a nice place for—for us."

He took her in his arms and her body was shuddering, her shoulders shaking with her sobs.

"I—I'm scared, Larry, I'm scared. What can we do?"

He reached into his pocket for a handkerchief and found he'd forgotten to put one there. He released her and went to his canvas bag, unzipped it. His hand came out of the bag slowly. He had put a souvenir pistol in the bag, all right, but his was a little, flat Japanese gun. The one in his hand was a heavy, round-barreled German army P-38. Julie came over and stood beside him, staring at the gun.

"What is it?"

He tried to swallow the dry lump in his throat, but it wouldn't go down. It made his voice a hoarse, croaking whisper. "It's the last straw. It must be the gun that killed the man in the trunk."

"Larry, can't we just go to the police and tell them the whole story?"

He shook his head hopelessly. She herself had said that his story was fantastic, and she loved him. He could imagine what the cops would say, if he went to them and gave them a gun with his fingerprints on it; led them to a hotel room that he had signed for with a phony name; showed them a corpse in a trunk with his prints all over it; told them that the trunk and the hotel reservation had probably come from Washington, where he himself had been twenty-four hours ago, with time he couldn't account for. And then say, "But, please, Mr. Policeman, don't arrest me. Go out and find a man with a big nose who said he was Bernard Arendel, but probably isn't because he just made up that name to frame me with!"

Cole hadn't realized that he had been thinking aloud, until Julie repeated the name.

"Arendel—Arendel." She turned to him with wide, excited eyes. "Larry! The county auditor just made a check on an investment firm called Arendel and Kessler! I don't know what it was about, but everyone in the auditor's office was in a turmoil about it. I'm sure something was wrong with the firm."

She ran out into the little foyer, and returned with a telephone directory. She thumbed pages, finally ran her finger down a list of names.

"Here it is! And it's B. Arendel! The Mutual Trust Building, on West Madison."

He wanted to go alone, but she refused absolutely to be left behind. "I couldn't stand the strain alone," she told him. "I want to be with you, no matter what!"

ARENDEL AND KESSLER, Investments, occupied half of an entire floor of the big office building. The reception room was large and elaborate, with leather upholstered chairs, chromium ashstands, and a little glassed-off enclosure for the receptionist and her switchboard. Behind the receptionist's cage, through big, plate-glass panels, Cole and Julie could see row after row of desks, but all of them were empty. Save for the brassy blonde receptionist, the whole place looked deserted.

"I'm sorry," the receptionist told them in a tired voice, "but we're not doing business today." She tried to plug out two lights at once on the switchboard, and repeated the statement into the mouthpiece resting on her over-ample bosom.

"I don't want to do business," Cole told her. "I want to see Mr. Arendel about something very personal."

"I'm sorry," she said. "Mr. Arendel is in Washington being investigated by a Senate committee. Mr. Kessler is in Baltimore visiting his son who is just back from overseas. And I'm in a state of confusion that's driving me batty!"

She swung back to the switchboard and said monotonously, "I'm sorry, we're not doing business today. No, I don't know, I'm sorry."

Julie's face fell and she turned back to the door. Cole started to turn, then swung back to the brassy blonde.

"Say, what does Mr. Arendel look like?"

"He's a prune-faced old guy with a bald head. Now, go away, will ya."

In the corridor, Cole stood for a moment with his back to the door. "Well, there's my last angle," he said hopelessly. "You go on home, Julie. I'm getting out of town as fast as I can get!"

"No, Larry! You can't quit!"

"There's nothing more I can do, Julie! We agreed a long time ago that if either of us changed we could call everything off between us. Well, I'm calling it off!"

"No, Larry! Not like this!" She sagged against him, buried her face on his chest. "If you go away, take me with you," she sobbed.

He put his arms around her, rested his cheek against her hair, and tried to soothe her. He paid no attention to the footsteps that passed them. If anyone wanted to witness this little scene, let them. Cole didn't care. A door down the hall was closing when he looked up. Cole couldn't see the man going into the office, but on the frosted glass panel he could see the silhouette of the man's profile. And there was only one profile like it!

Cole gripped Julie's arms below her shoulders and thrust her away from him. He ran down the hall and twisted open the door, tugging the German automatic pistol from his pocket with his other hand.

"Hello, murderer," he crooned between closed teeth.

The Nose turned around slowly, then froze when he saw the gun in Cole's hand. A sickly smile flickered onto his face. Julie came into the room and closed the door behind her.

"Larry! What are you doing?"

"I don't know yet," Cole said, without taking his eyes off the smiling man in front of him. "This is the guy that framed me, and I'm either going to get me a confession out of this ant-eater, or I'm going to have a real murder to fry for!"

"A confession to what?" the big-nosed man asked, and his smile steadied on his face. He picked up a bronze letter opener from the desk and stood tapping its heavy handle into the palm of his hand. "I don't know what you're talking about, m'boy."

COLE braced his gun hand against his ribs and moved forward until the muzzle of the automatic almost touched the center of the other man's stomach.

"I don't know why you killed Arendel," he said, "but you didn't want his body found in Washington. Maybe because you didn't want it tied to that Senate investigation. You found me drunk in a bar and shooting off my mouth all about going to Chicago and not having any friends or family except for Julie here. So you figured me for the perfect patsy to hang your killing on. But it's not going



to work! Because your frame is too good! Unless you sit down there and write out a complete confession, there's no way out of this for me. I'll have nothing to lose by blowing a hole in your belly!"

The smile on the long-nosed man didn't even flicker.

"If you hand me that gun and surrender yourself," he said, "you may find yourself under arrest, but your little friend here won't be involved. But if you shoot me, she will automatically become an accessory, and will be considered as guilty of murder as you.

"Aside from that," he broadened his smile, "that gun you have in your hand is an automatic. You should know that you can't fire an automatic without pulling back the hammer!"

Cole realized his carelessness with the gun and raised his thumb quickly to cock the pistol. But he had taken his eyes from the Nose for an instant. In that instant the heavy handle of the letter opener clipped across the hard joint of his wrist, paralyzing his hand. Then Cole was looking into the muzzle of the gun, as the big-nosed man moved around behind his desk.

"I assure you, Mr. Cole, that I shan't hesitate to shoot the murderer of my partner, if you so much as make a move,

I took it for granted that, having served in the Pacific, you wouldn't be familiar with the operation of the German P-38. It happens to be one automatic with a double-action, and can be fired like a revolver, without cocking."

He reached down an immaculate finger and flipped a switch on his inter-office communication box.

"Miss Smith," he said. "Will you please call the police and tell them that I have a confessed murderer here in my office. And tell them to hurry."

The surprised voice of the brassy blonde came back from the box. "Mr. Kessler! We've been trying to locate you for two days! We—"

"Never mind that, Miss Smith, business can wait. Get the police." Kessler broke the connection.

Julie had been standing with her back to the door, standing very straight, her face pale and her trembling red lip held between her teeth. She took a deep breath.

"Do you really think that the police will believe you, Mr. Kessler?" Her voice was low and even. "When you had every reason for killing your partner and Larry had none?"

Kessler turned an almost kindly smile on her.

"I don't know what motives Mr. Cole had. Perhaps he got into a drunken argument. But I had none. I gain nothing from my partner's death. No insurance, no inheritance. His wife will get his share of the business. I can prove that I never saw this young man before in my life. I can prove that I haven't been in Washington in months. Friends saw me leave Baltimore on a train that has no connections to Washington."

JULIE walked across the room and placed her hands on the desk. Her voice had a touch of pity in it. "What's the use, Mr. Kessler? You aren't the type of man to bear up well under a prison sentence. You can't win. The auditors have already checked your books! You're no longer in business!"

Her words struck home. The smile vanished from under Kessler's enormous nose and his lips grew pale. "I—I don't believe it!"

"It's the only other reason left for you to have killed your partner. You must have been afraid that the Senate investigation of his private affairs might extend to an investigation of the firm. And it did, Mr. Kessler. Some of your clients must have gotten suspicious and demanded a public audit. Just flip the switch on the interphone and ask your secretary, Mr. Kessler. Your office couldn't locate you for two days, so you must not have been in Baltimore, where you were supposed to be."

He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. His hand moved toward the interphone slowly, as if he were afraid to touch it. He flipped the switch and said, "Miss Smith?"

The receptionist's voice came back in a rapid torrent of words. "I called the police, Mr. Kessler, but I don't think I should have. They have warrants for you and Mr. Arendel, both. A court order made us stop operations, and took all of the books. The auditors were here day before—"

Kessler's finger clicked off her voice. He stared up at Julie and Cole with deadened eyes. He motioned toward the door with the gun, and picked up a desk pen with his other hand. His voice was lifeless.

"Get out," he said. "The police are coming for a confessed murderer."

Julie and Cole backed out of the room. They were still standing in the corridor when the sharp explosion came from the office. Julie closed her eyes and rested her forehead on Cole's shoulder. He stroked her hair.

"It's all right, Julie. It's all right now. It's better this way."



Six Little Scoundrels

By E. C. Marshall

Dishonesty was not frowned upon in the strange club to which these slicksters applied. But the initiation fee for the one who sealed his application with deceit was homicide.



OUTSIDE the old house which stood high on a hill not far from the town of Queenston, the wild howling of the wind took on a new note. The wintry blasts had begun at six o'clock in the evening and had steadily mounted in intensity during supper and over the coffee and liqueur.

Within, in a large, cozy panelled room, softly lit by modulated well-chosen lamps, six people sat on huge overstuffed chairs before a fire that blazed low in a gigantic medieval fireplace. Coffee cups, both half full, were held respectively by a man and a woman. The others slowly sipped at their dark, sweet liqueur.

The male coffee drinker sucked meditatively at his cigar, put down his cup on an ornately carved table by the fire and glanced past the semicircle of faces at his host, a small, rather hunched-up man with a huge curved pipe hanging from his lips.

"A singular party, Lionel," he remarked. "But it's about time we got acquainted and found out precisely why we're here. As for myself, to begin with . . ." He puffed on his cigar expansively, preparing to continue.

Lionel Gorgo drew his pipe stem from his mouth.

"That won't be necessary, my friend. No names, except perhaps my own are required—and that you all know already." The master of the house emptied his pipe in an ashstand made from a single elephant tusk.

"You may all have heard," he began,

"of the Fifty Club." Gorgo paused as eyebrows went up around the semicircle, then continued. "The club is a social group of very odd and interesting people, drawn from a special segment of the population whose passions and livelihoods are equally intensive. People, in short, who are really different, who possess the burning desire to associate with others equally as different. Among our present membership, which is limited to only fifty, are an ex-king, several retired would-be world conquerors, a medical man who has discovered the secret of life and an artist who paints his pictures in handfuls of colored gas.

"Recently, due to the late war, five vacancies have occurred—and you five have been selected to fill them. As for myself, I am acting in this matter only as the representative of the club.

"Now," he paused and relighted his pipe, "to proceed with introductions, not of names, but of reputations and professions, which each of you has already communicated to me." He pointed to his original questioner.

"This gentleman is a Master Spy with a taste for confidences." Gorgo's finger wavered toward the woman to the Master Spy's right. "And this is a Confidence Woman, perhaps the cleverest in the country. However," he laughed shortly, "you can take your hands off your wallets. She deals only in astronomical sums."

Again the finger moved on, pointed to a short, youngish looking man who drew languidly on a Turkish cigarette.

"The International Jewel Thief," drawled Gorgo. "His specialty is rose diamonds, but he positively does not haunt drawing rooms or boudoirs. In short, his middle name is not Raffles. However, you may observe that he is easily as handsome."

Gorgo chuckled again, turned his gaze to the next in line. "The Politician," he announced. "In this case, you have already recognized his face. He is powerful, but discreet. We are not concerned with his politics, but his wit, his tastes, and his personality.

"The gentleman next to me," the master of the house indicated a large-headed, bearish male with a totally bald head, "is a Forger. He forges paintings," Gorgo added hastily, "so you needn't be afraid of mentioning the address of your bank accounts.

"As for myself, I am a Banker, rich and with ramifications. You know this, of course, and—"

THE light flickered. Somewhere in the room a sharp hiss broke the droning of Gorgo's voice. Then, abruptly, every lamp in the room went out. For an instant what seemed like total blackness prevailed. Simultaneously a gun roared.

The dying flames illuminated the group fitfully, but they plainly saw their host's body stiffen suddenly, rock from side to side, then, with a dark stream trickling down his shirt front, pitch forward from his chair to the floor.

In the instant of total silence that followed the sickening crunch of Gorgo's forehead smacking the ancient flooring, no one seemed to breathe. Then, as the old-fashioned doorbell tinkled insistently, the sudden release of breath from five tense mouths sounded like a sizzling firecracker.

The Politician jumped to his feet like a shot. "What was that?" he croaked.

The Jewel Thief threw him a crooked glance. "The doorbell," he said sarcastically, and lit a cigarette. He vanished through the great oaken portal that led to the entrance hall, returned a few minutes later.

Three men preceded him, two of them in the uniform of city police, the third a plainclothes man, obviously in command. The semicircle rose as the four entered the room.

"You can sit down," advised the detective. He paid little attention to the assemblage, threw his glance directly to the hearth, where the body of Lionel Gorgo lay sprawled.

"Light some candles," he ordered no one in particular. Everyone seemed to scramble for the ornamental candelabra that stood on tables throughout the room. In a moment it was aglow with soft, flickering lights.

The detective stood over Gorgo's body

for only a little while. Then he turned. "You'll all remain, of course. My name is Harry Kelp and here's my authority." He laid bare his badge.

The Master Spy raised his hand. "I believe we can get on faster with this inquiry if you knew who we were. I'm—"

"Never mind." Kelp's comment was curt. "I'm quite aware of all your identities." He took a sheaf of photographs from his pocket, selected one and held it up to the gaze of the Master Spy. "This is your photo, isn't it? Should be, for it's signed with your own name."

He held up the sheaf. "These," he said, "are the photos you all sent Mr. Gorgo when he requested one from each of you."

The Forger and the Confidence Woman spoke almost simultaneously. "Where did you get them?" they asked.

Kelp smiled wryly. "From Mr. Gorgo, of course," he replied. "Who else?"

"But why?" the Forger asked.

Kelp answered, throwing quick, searching glances about the room.

"For the same reason," he said, "that I'm here tonight with a pair of cops." He glanced at the corpse. "A little too late, I'm afraid—but, after all, how can I tell when somebody's trigger finger gets itchy?" His face darkened, grew stern.

"Gorgo contacted me by mail this morning. He explained this entire meeting, stating that something had gone wrong, that someone of you was dangerous. He gave me your names, your positions, the reasons why you were being invited." Then, as the others started, he raised a hand. "You needn't worry, my friends. The lot of you are shady, but not one is wanted by the police—as yet.

"But," interrupted the Confidence Woman, "you haven't explained why you arrived—"

"Gorgo phoned me two hours ago," replied Kelp. "He asked us to come out as unobtrusively as possible. If your friend here," he pointed to the International Jewel Thief, "hadn't told us at the door that a murder had occurred, we'd never have given you a breeze." Kelp paused and considered the ceiling. "Which reminds me—as it should remind you—that one of you is a killer and that the murder gun is missing."

The detective indicated the two policemen. "The boys will take care of you outside for awhile, while I search the room. When I'm finished I'll call you in one by one for questioning."

KELP was alone in the murder room for about half an hour. Then, opening the door he had carefully locked behind him, the detective called the suspects in one by one. The interviews lasted but a scant ten minutes or so apiece. When they were all over, Kelp had everyone return and seat themselves about the fire, which was again blazing merrily.

Kelp seated himself in Gorgo's chair, brushed his fingers of something that clung to their tips and drew a badly discolored revolver from his pocket.

"It was in the fireplace, of course, hidden under that pile of soft ashes. Naturally no one would look for a gun in a redhot fireplace," he glanced toward it, "especially if it were in a bed of glowing coals and wood ash."

Kelp paused and waved the gun. "The murderer fired at the instant the lights went out, then tossed the gun in the fireplace. No one saw him, of course, because for all practical purposes the room was in darkness."

Kelp snapped the firing chamber. "A brave and desperate man, whoever he was," he remarked quietly. "There was only one bullet in the gun. He had to succeed the first time, for the remaining bullets, had there been any, would have exploded in the fireplace."

The detective looked at them quizzically and they stared back white-faced.

"Is one of you a desperate man—or woman? I wonder." He put the gun away. "Unfortunately, Gorgo never told me who he suspected. So I had to find out for myself."

"And you found out?" The Politician's lips were trembling.

Kelp stared into the fireplace.

"Gorgo told me everything about you five. I have it all written out. Your names, positions, specialties and so forth. Your

personal and public dishonesties. In all these I have no interest except insofar as they bear on the case. One thing stands out above all. Everyone of you is basically dishonest. But there are two further remarkable things. First, you have all admitted this failing. But, secondly, one of you is dishonest about his dishonesty. He is, in short, not the person he has made himself out to be. He is masquerading in shoes that do not fit him at all. And he is a murderer twice, once of Gorgo, again of the person he is impersonating."

The detective let his eyes wander over the semicircle of faces. Abruptly they stopped, fastened on a face, which instantly tensed to the breaking point.

"The International Jewel Thief, unfortunately, knows nothing about jewels, which, like politics, painting and pickpockets, is a hobby of mine. He thought rose diamonds were most valuable pink stones. They are not, of course, they are merely chips."

"But that—" The International Jewel Thief started up from his chair, was covered instantly by cop guns.

"Is no proof of murder?" asked Kelp. "I agree. But the Politician really knows nothing about politics, either. The Forger imagines Dali superior to Picasso, an inferior judgment. And the Master Spy hasn't sold a secret since the war ended. However, an International Jewel Thief died recently, murdered in New York, shot to death, as a matter of fact, with a gun of this caliber. You come from New York. None of the others do at all."

The phony jewel thief sneered. "This farce isn't funny!"

Kelp's face was grim. "Just pathetic. But it just happens that the wire of the lamp sitting beside the chair you occupy was worn through with a piece of metal recently. The short killed every other lamp in the roof, for as in all old houses the wiring is on the same circuit." He glanced appraisingly at a huge gold ring on the other's right hand. "Would you mind—"

The thief's face relaxed. Suddenly he was old, tired and beaten.

"Desperate was right," he said, slowly. His eyes flickered out like extinguished lamps. "I had to take a chance. Membership in the Fifty Club would have led to contacts, Easy Street. . . . Unfortunately Gorgo found out."

Kelp slipped bracelets on him. "Unfortunately," he remarked, "as a Complete Crook, you haven't even gotten out of kindergarten."



Murder Crossroads

By Ralph Berard



Because the dwindling Berkster family were all odd, young Thon Berkster never knew his seclusive uncle. But the oddest thing of all was the diabolical twist fate gave to Thon's clear-cut scheme to make himself the lucrative last of the line.

LOOKING back at it, Thon Berkster decided it all began the day they brought his father home dead. His father dropped on the street of San Marquin, the little California town where they lived. The old man's heart stopped as they carried him up the steps.

Thon was twenty-six. His father's sudden heart attack shocked him into sort of a coma. Somehow he gave instructions about the funeral, saw the remains laid to rest, then, when he came back to the cottage, his father's lawyer, a grey-

haired old-timer named Jim Lawton, was sitting on the steps.

"Buck up, lad," Lawton said patting Thon's shoulder. "Your dad wasn't young anymore. He was already near fifty when you were born."

Thon agreed thoughtfully, "I guess he couldn't live forever."

"He didn't leave you much, lad," Lawton said. The lawyer was silent a spell, then added, "Do you know where he got his money? He never worked much."

Thon looked up. "No, I don't know where he got it. He always gave me what I needed. We never talked about it."

The lawyer frowned, got up slowly, stroked his chin and looked at Thon. "There's about three thousand cash, and this house. The house isn't much, maybe worth twenty-five hundred." Lawton stood rubbing the toe of his shoe against the cement as if weighing whether he'd ought to say something more. "Your dad got money someplace," he said slowly. "Every three or four years he'd bring me ten or fifteen thousand dollars in cash and tell me to invest it. Before it was gone he'd bring me another big batch. He never explained where it came from."

Lawton left. Thon got up and went into the house. It was shady and cool inside. He sat down in his father's big chair and looked into the gas fireplace until he fell asleep.

That night Lawyer Lawton's house burned down. When the San Marquin volunteer fire department got the ashes cool and pulled Lawton's remains out of the fire, his papers had all been destroyed. Thon never learned where his father had kept the three thousand dollars or where it was invested.

But a few days later Thon found an old trunk in the attic.

He was just wandering aimlessly around the cottage when he happened to glance up and notice the little irregularities in the ceiling fresco which indicated a trapdoor. He got a chair, pushed on the ceiling. An opening appeared there, and he climbed into the attic.

There was a small window. A writing desk sat near it. There was a flat metal-clasped trunk near the desk. In the cubby-holes of the desk he found papers, envelopes, stamps, pen and ink. His father must have come up here occasionally. Thon could never remember his father writing more than two or three letters, but it looked like that was what he did here in the attic.

The trunk wasn't locked. When Thon opened it, a bundle of letters rolled out. There were some pictures. By bits of scribbling on one, he recognized the house where he must have been born. He saw his mother's likeness for the first time. There was a picture of his father with another man who looked almost like his father except much younger. The other man was his father's brother, Thon's uncle. That was where the money had come from.

Thon spent the afternoon reading and studying the letters, and that was when he first considered killing his uncle. At first, it was just a silly thought. But the more he read of the last letter his dad had received from his younger brother, the more he kept thinking about killing.

The letter was dated a year back. One part read:

> . . . I'M SENDING TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS IN SMALL BILLS. I'VE ALSO DECIDED TO MAKE A WILL EVEN THOUGH IT'S LIKELY YOU'LL PASS AWAY BEFORE I DO, BECAUSE YOU'RE SO MUCH OLDER. THERE'S NOBODY TO LEAVE MY QUARTER MILLION TO BUT YOU. IF YOU DIE FIRST I HARDLY KNOW WHAT I'LL DO WITH IT.
>
> I'VE LEFT THE WILL WITH SAM COOK, MY LAWYER. HE'S GOT YOUR ADDRESS. I GUESS THAT'S ALL THAT'S NECESSARY EXCEPT THAT I'D LIKE TO FIX THINGS SO THAT KID OF YOURS WON'T GET ALL THE MONEY AT ONCE IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO YOU. TOO MUCH MONEY IS LIKELY TO STIFLE A YOUNG FELLOW'S AMBITION . . .

The letter was written in a cramped hand. It was plain Thon's uncle, who signed himself, Herman, didn't like to write any better than Thon's father. The next previous letter had been written four years before with no indication they had written to each other in between. Thon Berkster began to realize he was part of a rather odd family.

Thon got to thinking of murder. His Uncle Herman didn't know his brother, Thon's father, was dead. If Herman died before finding out about it, Thon would inherit the money as his father's only heir. But if Herman learned his brother was dead, he'd likely change his will. Herman's letter indicated he wasn't strong for leaving his brother's boy much.

THON BERKSTER thought too much about the thing He wanted that quarter of a million. It would take care of him as long as he lived. He would never have to work again. Thon decided to go at once to the north coast city where his uncle lived. By the time he got there he had worked out an airtight scheme for killing Herman.

First, Thon found a small apartment. The landlady's name was Ferguson, a little stubby energetic woman.

"I don't generally take men who batch," she informed him.

Thon smiled. "I'm a good housekeeper. I'll be working all day and I keep pretty much to myself evenings."

She rented him the place, then he spent a week finding the job he wanted, clerking in a chain grocery store on Elm Street. He hadn't even looked up his uncle's place. Everything was to look as if he didn't even know he had an uncle. The store where he worked was walking distance from the apartment. Sometimes he wore coveralls, sometimes a plain work suit. Lots of guys wear coveralls and plain suits.

Thon practiced combing his hair pompadour. That changed his appearance. A man can pencil his eyebrows a tiny trifle. That changes him. A very tiny bit of rouge will help make a person look different. Thon experimented and found out about all these things.

Mrs. Ferguson was a motherly sort of person. Thon wanted to build a good reputation so no one would imagine him as the kind who would kill anyone. It seemed like Mrs. Ferguson was always cleaning the halls or working in the basement. She had to run the furnace herself.

When Thon had a little time, he helped her. In the evenings he sometimes helped her in the basement. She trusted him. Often tenants would come and pay a month's rent while Thon was helping her. He would see her put the money in a well-worn billfold which had an extra large safety pin stuck through it. She would pin it inside her dress, sometimes with four or five hundred dollars in it. Once she said to Thon:

"It's a good thing I can trust you. Some people would hit an old lady on the head to get that much money."

"Not me," Thon smiled. He smiled with genuine humor. He couldn't help thinking how foolish it would be to steal a few hundred dollars in such a clumsy way, when he was going to obtain a quarter of a million in a sure-fire way without a chance of getting caught. Maybe there were other people living in the apartment who had also realized old lady Ferguson was careless with her money, but Thon never thought about that. It wasn't any of his business.

Thon had never worn a cap. He bought one. One evening after dusk he fixed himself up in his rather slight disguise, just enough so he didn't quite look like Thon Berkster. He walked across town and looked up Herman's address.

It was a modest little white bungalow in a newer section of town. It didn't surprise Thon to learn that a man worth quarter of a million should be a lone bachelor without servants. That would be like a Berkster.

A sign reading, *Room for Rent,* in a window directly across the street, was exactly what Thon wanted. The lady who answered his ring was middle-aged, pleasant. She asked him into a homey sitting room.

"Are you all alone?" she inquired.

"I like to be alone," he smiled at her. "Hardly ever have company. Sometimes I don't get home till late. Some nights I stay downtown with a friend and often I'll leave early in the morning. If I can have a key, I'll be careful not to wake anyone coming and going."

Thon had suddenly become two different people and how easy it was, pleased him. After the young fellow who lived

here in the room on Brown Avenue had killed the old man across the street, he would disappear. He would simply destroy a cap, throw away an eyebrow pencil, and never comb his hair pompadour again.

ONE evening, when he went to the Brown Avenue room early, he met his uncle. Herman was across the street fiddling with his car. Thon just walked over and said:

"Having trouble?"

Herman pulled a scraggly head from under the raised hood and looked Thon over inquisitively. "No trouble. Damn thing just won't run is all."

Thon laughed, sidled to the other side of the hood and stuck his head under. He knew a little about cars. Herman knew nothing. In ten minutes Thon had Herman's car percolating. When he asked Thon if he wanted to ride downtown, Thon couldn't resist. He hadn't ridden in a car for months.

At first Herman didn't say much. Every so often he glanced sideways at Thon questioningly. Finally he growled, "I never asked any stranger to ride with me before."

Thon told him his name was Norman Reynolds. He had come to the city to make some money and get experience. The old guy seemed lonesome. After that first ride, Thon saw Herman as often as he dared.

Thon had to be careful, specially with the eyebrow stuff and the rouge. The least little bit too much would be noticeable. He always rubbed it in well. He always washed up thoroughly someplace where his dual identity would not be detected.

Thon became callous and cold as ice in his planning. The hell of it was that he got to liking Uncle Herman. Herman got so he talked more friendlily and even more confidentially than Thon's own father had ever done. He invited Thon into his house, even told Thon after a while where he kept his cash hidden. The old fellow had several hobbies. Thon pretended to take a great interest in them. They got so they would laugh and joke together. Herman treated Thon as if he was his own kid.

"We Berksters are an odd pair," Herman said one day. "There's just two of us. My brother's ten years older, lives in San Marquin, California. He got married and had a boy, but it didn't last long. His wife ran off."

"Oh!" Thon exclaimed. "That's two bad. What happened to the boy?"

"Never saw the boy. He's with his father. He's likely worthless like his mother."

This was the first time Thon had ever heard about his mother. He was interested "Was his mother worthless?"

Herman looked thoughtful, frowned. "M-maybe not. She claimed my brother, George, was the worthless one. Maybe she was right. Neither George nor me ever was ambitious or worked much.

"But you must have done all right," Thon suggested. This was a breathless moment for Thon. He was drawing Herman out about his money, but of course Herman didn't know he was signing his own death warrant by what he said.

Herman began to laugh in a scoffing way as if to imply that the world was a crazy place. "I never did well," he said. "I just had luck. I always saved my money when I did work a little. Once about twenty-five years ago I saved up three hundred dollars. I saw a sign in a broker's window in Seattle which said, *Buy Sunshine Mining Stock and Get Rich*, or something like that. After I bought ten thousand shares at three cents a share, somebody told me the broker wasn't reliable."

Herman stopped talking to laugh so hard that several tears ran down his skinny cheeks. "That stock is listed in New York now at more than twenty dollars a share. The yearly dividends are three times what I need. Every four or five years I sent George ten or fifteen thousand dollars and . . ."

After a little Herman went on more thoughtfully, "I doubt if George's boy deserves that money, but if I should die and George died I suppose he'd get it."

Herman went into a long spell of silence, looked at Thon a couple of times,



then closed his eyes as if thinking. "You're a fine lad, Norman. I sure appreciate how much interest you take in me. I'm an old man. Young fellows don't generally take an interest in old folks like me."

For a moment tears of a different kind shone in his old eyes. But Thon didn't realize how much his visits had really come to mean to Herman. All he could make out of their relationship was that he was letting himself get soft. If he didn't kill the old duffer pretty soon, he wouldn't have the nerve to do it at all.

A week later Thon killed his uncle.

Herman had car trouble again. Thon was helping in the garage one evening. It wasn't quite dark yet. Herman was kneeling near the right rear wheel. Thon had a heavy wrench. Holding the wrench in both hands, he brought it down on Herman's skull with every once of his strength.

Herman sort of grunted, sprawled forward on his face, clawed at the dirt floor several times, then lay quivering a moment before he stiffened out.

It was funny how calm Thon felt. He wiped the wrench clear of possible fingerprints. Not that he cared much about prints. He had things figured so the Thon Berkster who worked in the chain grocery store would never be connected with Norman Reynolds who would now disappear. Why should anyone ever worry about Thon Berkster's prints or connect him with the murder of an uncle about whom he presumably didn't know?

Thon went from the garage to Herman's house. He took about three hundred dollars Herman kept in a little box in his bedroom. He ransacked the place. Robbery was to be the motive. But Thon didn't take anything he couldn't carry in his pockets

It was dark when he left. There was a light in his landlady's house across the street. He wondered what she would think when the police told her her quiet roomer had murdered her neighbor.

AS THON crossed Memorial Bridge walking slowly downtown, he tossed the stolen money into the river along with the other articles he had taken. He dropped the cap, rouge, makeup stuff off the bridge in the darkness, then he stopped in a city rest room and washed every trace of makeup off his features, recombed his hair, and moved on toward Mrs. Ferguson's place.

Going along the hallway, he became possessed with a feeling of insecurity. The rooming house seemed strangely hushed and foreboding. Thon stepped into his own apartment with a strange

consciousness of danger. A hard voice demanded:

"Stand where you are!"

Thon stopped, suddenly terrified. A man stood before him holding a gun. A second man, a few feet to the right, also held a gun. The first flipped back his coat and displayed a detective's badge.

Thon stood helplessly while they searched him, not understanding what was going on. "What did you do with the money?" one of the officers demanded.

Thon's throat became tight. His heart began to hammer against his lungs. "I don't know what money you're talking about," he said. He was telling the truth.

"We got enough evidence to hang you anyway," the detective said. They handcuffed Thon and led him outside to a police car, paying no attention to his protests of innocence. Thon really didn't know what they were talking about but they wouldn't believe that.

At headquarters, they questioned him. They gave him the third degree. Finally he was thrown into a cell, aching, and confused from the working over they had given him. It was three days before he was able to piece together what had happened.

His landlady, Mrs. Ferguson, had been murdered. Someone had followed her into the basement. She had been shot through the head with a .38 automatic. The gun had been found in Thon's apartment under his pillow. Several persons had related how Thon often worked in the basement alone with the landlady. The police had found a two-dollar bill on the floor just inside Thon's door. There was a corner torn off the bill. One of Mrs. Ferguson's tenants identified it as one she had used in paying her rent that very same day.

Half an hour after Thon had been arrested, the police had picked up a gangster named Blacky Kling. Blacky was wanted for murder in other places, too. They had been hunting him a long time and he had four hundred dollars on him. Blacky reluctantly admitted he had held Thon up for the money after the killing. He said he only knew about the shooting, because he had heard the shot and gone to investigate.

When Thon heard Blacky's story, he cried out, "I know now what really happened! I've seen this fellow around the place. He had a transient room. He must have known Mrs. Ferguson kept money with her. He knew I sometimes helped her in the basement. He killed her, then planted the gun and the two-dollar bill in my room."

The cops scoffed loudly. "You two worked together," they claimed. "You must have got about eight hundred dollars and divided it. You got rid of your half while you were out, then came back to your room because you didn't think we'd search the whole building and find the gun. You didn't know you'd dropped the two-dollar bill. You were a bit excited."

That was the way it was. Thon couldn't break it down because the cops kept saying, "If you didn't kill her, where were you? What's your alibi?"

Thon paled when he tried to answer. His flesh grew cold. "I just went out for a walk," he said.

"Maybe you bought cigarettes," the cops said sarcastically. "Maybe you talked with someone who will remember your sweet and innocent face. Maybe you can prove where you were when Mrs. Ferguson was murdered."

They put Thon back in a cell. Time dragged on. They filed a first degree murder charge. A similar charge was filed against Black Kling, but it was for a different murder where they said they had a sure case against Blacky. The case was strongest against Thon in the Ferguson murder. The police wanted to be sure that both would hang.

Thon waited. He smoked innumerable cigarettes. He tried to figure something out. He wondered what the police were doing about the Herman Berkster case. He never heard anything about that. He didn't dare ask.

Sometimes he would laugh bitterly. This was a hell of a crude joke on him. He'd committed a perfect crime. Now he was going to hang for the clumsiest kind

of fool killing done by a common gangster.

ONE day a guard brought a man to Thon's cell. He was a tall lanky black-eyed fellow wearing a spotless blue serge suit. There was a flower in his buttonhole. The guard stepped back out of earshot. The tall stranger said:

"Blacky sent me. I'm Dresden Starritt. How much money you got?"

Thon stared at him, not understanding. "Dresden Starritt? I don't get it."

"I'm a lawyer, you dope. You're going to fry. You know that, don't you?"

"Fry?" Thon wasn't a gangster. "Fry? I don't know what you mean."

Starritt frowned. "You're going to the chair. It isn't likely we can save you, but we can try. Some wheels can always be greased. Some votes can always be bought. It will take twenty-five grand."

Hope flickered up in Thon. "You mean twenty-five thousand dollars? Yeah, sure. I tell you what you do. You look up—"

Thon stopped himself. The cold chill went up his spine again. He had been about to tell Starritt to look up Sam Cook, Herman's lawyer, and see about getting some money. To free himself of one murder, he had almost convicted himself of knowing about the other.

Starritt stood looking at him expectantly.

Thon bit his lips, looked away. He finally sank back on his cot dejectedly. "There's about ten days yet. Maybe I can raise some money."

Then all Thon could do was wait again, with the certainty of death always right beside him. All the hope he had left was based on the power of money. Sam Cook must have learned by now that Herman's brother had died. Herman's lawyer would certainly get Thon's address from folks in San Marquin.

A quarter of a million! The power of money! Good lawyers! Specially hired witnesses! Faked alibis! Judges could be bribed. Even jurors could be bought. A man like Starritt would know how to go about these things. With all that money Thon could still beat the rap . . . if only Sam Cook would hurry . . . hurry . . . hurry.

Ten days! Nine days. Eight . . . Seven . . .

The trial was still six days away when Sam Cook came.

He was a small, pleasant man dressed neatly and conservatively in grey. He smiled at Thon and said sympathetically, "I'm awful sorry, son, to find you in trouble like this."

Herman's old lawyer sat down and talked with Thon for more than an hour. He acted more like a preacher than a lawyer. He brought Thon to see the worthlessness, the utter uselessness of money. He brought Thon face to face with death. Hope had left Thon entirely before he began to sense even in advance what Sam Cook was finally going to tell him. Even then he couldn't possibly forsee what a strange and unbelievable thing had really happened.

"Two days before he was murdered," Cook said, "I told your Uncle Herman that I had learned your father was dead. Herman decided at once that he wanted to change his will. He made me draw up a new one that very same day."

Thon looked at the lawyer dully, a thin pale smile on his face. The smile had no meaning. Thon was no longer capable of feeling emotion. His face was only a mask. He asked faintly, "To whom did Herman leave his money?"

Sam Cook's face held a vacant, thoughtful look as he said, "Herman felt that a young fellow who lived across the street from him had been kind and thoughtful and had befriended him. He left everything except a dollar to a lad I expect you never heard of, a chap called Norman Reynolds. He didn't have to leave you the dollar, but maybe he wanted to be sure somebody looked you up so you would know he was dead."

Dungeon Destiny

By L. W. Carmichael

When Sam sneaked down into those horror-haunted prison vaults in the dead of night, he should have been prepared to reckon personally with the devil's own watchman.





I LEVERED myself over the crumbling wall and dropped into the old prison yard. If I'd been dropping into a den of man-hungry lions I couldn't have felt less enthusiastic.

The trouble was that everything looked and sounded so different in the black of night. Take the gallows in the center of the yard, for instance. In the daytime I'd never noticed how the noose creaked as it swung on its crossbeam. But I noticed it now, and got to imagining how the corpses must have looked as they swayed to the winds of a century and a half ago.

I pushed on past the gallows until I'd reached the shed housing the manhole that opened into the dungeons two hundred feet below. There I paused, gulping a little at the prospect of going down there where the prisoners had once lain and rotted in their fetters. If I'd followed my inclination I'd have abandoned the project in the hope of accomplishing it the following day. But I knew that would never do.

During the daytime Joe Loney kept me too busy, either in the antique store he ran over the road or else here in this historical relic, of which he was the official keeper and the chief guide.

I was his assistant guide. The catch to that, though, was that I mightn't get the chance to show a party around for a week or more. Joe, see, was a pinch-penny. He wanted all the sightseers' tips for himself.

I lowered myself down the ladder until I'd reached the bottom. There I switched on the portable electric lamp they provided us with and started along a tunnel hewn out of the solid rock. The damp chill of the place searched through my clothes. Drops of moisture fell from the roof and touched my neck with icy fingers. My shuffling feet threw a thousand echoes up and down the gullies. It seemed strange and lonesome to be walking there unaccompanied by folks eager to absorb the novelty and the morbid atmosphere of the place.

And it was doubly strange not to be sounding off with my guide's spiel as I went along:

"These caverns, ladies and gentlemen, were dug by prospectors searching for lead over two centuries ago. Later, long after the mines were abandoned, the State conceived the idea that this would be the perfect place for incarcerating its more desperate criminals—not to mention its Tories and similar political figures. Every nook and cranny of this hell-hole has its own history of death and decay and destruction. Right here was the spot where a brutal warden flogged the notorious cutthroat Sims Jamieson to death.

"And here—see where the ancient fetter is snapped from the wall—is where a giant mutineer broke free, went berserk and slaughtered four of his chained fellow-prisoners before the guards, hearing their death screams, rushed down and poured musket shot into him—"

I shuddered. Recalling the words of my spiel was a helluva way to comfort myself.

I entered the tunnel known as Echo Alley. Prisoners had gone insane in this

place where the tiniest whisper was magnified and distorted a thousandfold by its peculiar acoustics. I'd been up here a hundred times in the past without being particularly awed by it. But now I suddenly got the feeling that someone or some Thing was following me. I stopped and listened. But I heard nothing save the steady drip, drip, drip of the falling water.

AGAIN I resumed my way, thrusting aside all thoughts of the past and thinking only of the present, of how strange it was that the sight of a woman fashioning a hooked rug had supplied the motivation for this trip underground.

That hooked rug had set me thinking, see. It had reminded me of the time the state trooper had dropped into the antique store a week before.

Joe Loney and I were uncrating china Joe had bought at an auction when the trooper made his appearance.

He said, "Who's the boss around here?"

When Joe acknowledged he was, the trooper went on, "The New York police asked our cooperation in checking the whereabouts of a man named George B. Stoddard. He's been missing for the past month, and his wife is so crazy with anxiety she's offering a five grand reward for information concerning him. Even if he's dead she wants to know the worst. He's a dealer in antiques and he was making a tour of New England looking for buys for his New York store.

"When last seen he was in Brattleboro, Vermont, on March 14th. Since he was due to attend a sale in Springfield, Massachusetts, the following afternoon it's possible he might have touched this particular store on his way south. He was driving a '46 Cadillac, was bald, middle-aged, short, stocky, of florid complexion and was wearing a grey tweed suit of a pronounced herringbone pattern? Can you help us any?"

Joe thought the matter over, shook his head, turned to me. "You ever see anyone answering that description around here, Sam?"

I shook my head, too. "No."

"The police theory is he was waylaid and maybe murdered," said the trooper. "He was a wealthy man and carried more dough around with him than was safe. He had about ten grand on him."

Joe nodded. "I wouldn't be surprised. Most of those big dealers carry plenty lettuce when they go exploring. They pay cash for things so's to get 'em cheaper. Folks don't haggle over prices so much when you pay with the real stuff."

The trooper turned to the door. "Bear the matter in mind, boys. There may be five thousand in it for you."

I'd followed his advice and borne the matter in mind. And within a week I'd seen that hooked rug.

So here I was, only a couple of minutes away from finding out whether or not the thought processes set in motion by the sight of the rug were justified in their conclusions.

Once more the feeling of being followed pinned itself on me. Once more I rejected it as being no more than nervousness. I kept plodding on until I reached the mouth of a tunnel situated in the furthermost corner of the old mine. A sign over the entrance warned, *Rock Collapse Imminent—Positively Do Not Enter!*

I entered anyhow, going along it bent almost double, the cold perspiration from the roof making my ears and neck chillier and wetter by the second. I was no longer worrying about the ghostly past. All I had time to worry about now was the possibility of the roof caving in.

The going was tough and hazardous because of the loose rock underfoot and the sagging rock overhead. When I say sagging I mean just that. Hell! there was one place where the rock actually moved and groaned as I rested my hand on it.

I kept going until I reached the place where the tunnel ended in a crevice maybe twenty feet deep. I knelt down at the brink of the crevice, shot the beam of my lamp down it, bracing myself for what I might see.

I'd needed to be braced all right. He was down there! The missing antique dealer!

His corpse had been perfectly preserved by the chilly atmosphere. Death had

drained away the florid complexion, his eyes were wide and staring. His bald head was shattered, and caked with blood. His herringbone suit was gone, of course; he'd been stripped to his underwear.

I felt no triumph over my discovery. All I felt right then was my stomach turning over and over. And then I nearly took leave of my skin as a voice boomed and echoed from the tunnel in back of me!

"So—you found it, Sammy boy?"

MY HEAD shot around. Joe Loney was standing within twenty feet of me. The cold rim of his revolver muzzle menaced me. He switched on a light similar to the one I carried, said, "What wised you, Sam?"

I shivered, tried to speak, but found that no words would come out. He repeated his question, the threat of death in his voice.

I remained on my knees, too paralyzed with fright to trust myself on my quivering legs. Somehow I got my tongue unfrozen, said, "The—the hooked rug your wife was making had—had herringbone tweed in it and—and I knew no one in the village ever had a suit like that."

Joe nodded, "Yeah, taking the suit off the corpse was a mistake. But with me a penny saved is always a penny earned. I realized my mistake after that cop called. I tried to burn the thing, but the wife caught me at it and I had to let her have it because I couldn't so well explain why she shouldn't. What else wised you?"

I blinked away the cold sweat that was streaming into my eyes, went on talking, figuring that was the only way I could postpone the inevitable. I said, "I—I just put two and two together. It was this way. A month back you were broke, then suddenly you'd found the money to restock your store with real fancy stuff. I suspected the only place you could have got the dough was from the wallet and the Cadillac car of the guy who wore the herringbone suit."

"What made you come looking down here?" asked Joe.

Cautiously I groped behind me for a loose stone I could maybe throw in a last desperate attempt to save my life. I said, "You often entertain customers by showing them round the caves. And where is there a better place for dumping a body than right here?"

"Yessir, you've sure got a head on you," said Joe. "Too bad a smart guy like you had to come down here the same night I finished fixing the time bomb I'm gonna use to blast down this rotten roof. Y'know, I'd only figured on burying one corpse—not two!"

My fingers closed on a rock the size of a baseball. Hope stirred feebly inside me. I figured that since Joe knew the roof above him was in such bad shape he wouldn't dare fire the revolver for fear of what the vibrations following the blast would do.

Just why he *did* fire I'll never know. I imagine his finger tightened involuntarily on the trigger when I reared back to let the rock go.

The gunshot sounded deafening in that enclosed space. But it was a mere whisper compared with what followed.

The rock of the sagging roof groaned and rumbled. Then suddenly there was nothing else in the world but grinding and roaring and thundering noise.

I lay there, coughing and wheezing as the dust of pulverized stone searched down into my lungs. Then gradually, as the noise subsided and the rock beneath me ceased to bound, it dawned on me that neither the bullet nor yet the cave-in had got me, that miraculously enough the roof over my head was still in place.

But any sense of relief I felt then was abruptly dissipated when, on locating my lamp, I found it shattered. I panicked at the thought of being shut in down there along with the two corpses and slowly—day by day—feeling life ebb out of me.

Then came the slightest glow of optimism. The feeble light of the match I struck suggested there might, there just barely might be some way over the fallen rock and under the new roof.

An hour later, my fingers torn to shreds from scrabbling my way through, I started drunkenly up the ladder towards the fresh air . . . and the five grand reward that was awaiting my claim.

Wake Up to Nightmare

By Norman A. Daniels



Because a wizard of Wall Street had a dream of murder, the department turned it over to matter-of-fact Detective Daley. But when that nightmare vision turned into daytime reality, it took all of Daley's crime-wise conjuring to bring the killer to bay.

HIS appearance alone was overbearing. The kind of man who shows that he has money and wants people to know it. His manners were preposterous, for he walked into Police Headquarters as though he had just been elected, unanimously, chief of all police chiefs in the country.

He was bulging a bit around the midriff and tried hard to conceal this. His hair was well greyed and a bit thin on top, but his mustache was black as ink and bristled. He wore a grey business suit that told, in no uncertain manner, that it had been especially created for its owner and ran a couple of hundred dollars a

creation. His shoes were very pointed and shone like glass.

The desk lieutenant looked idly at him. Desk lieutenants meet all kinds and nothing astonishes them. "Yes," he said. "What can I do for you?"

The pompous man had a voice that rasped a little. A trifle more and it would have been a growl. He said, "I would like to see the head of your Homicide Division. The head of it, mind you, not some underling."

The desk lieutenant picked up a telephone and asked for Homicide. He hung up a moment later.

"At the present time," he said, "Sergeant Jess Daley is in charge. And don't get him wrong. He's the smartest cop on the force. He'll take care of you."

The visitor drew himself up slightly. "I really think I should be taken to an inspector . . ."

"None around," the desk lieutenant dismissed him. "You see Sergeant Daley or cool your heels for a few hours. That's the way it is, mister."

He watched the man strut toward the doorway beside which was an arrow and a sign indicating Homicide was in that direction. The man walked down the dismal corridor, scowling a bit and swinging his cane nervously. He didn't knock at the door marked Sergeant Daley. He simply wasn't used to knocking. He walked right in.

Sergeant Jess Daley had both feet planked on the edge of a battered old desk. His hat was pushed to the back of his head, his coat hung on the chair, and a service pistol sagged limply by its shoulder harness. Sergeant Daley was about thirty-eight. He didn't look like much until you studied his eyes. Then you got the idea that a shrewd brain percolated behind that skull.

The pompous man sat down, primly, as if he were afraid of getting his clothes soiled. He put the cane between his knees, grasped its crooked handle until the whites of the knuckles gleamed, then cleared his throat.

"Okay," Daley grunted. "Let's have it."

The pompous man said, "I am David Tyler. Undoubtedly, you have heard of me."

Daley nodded. "Yes, we dicks get around. You cornered a few million dollars. Your picture is in the newspapers every now and then. So you're David Tyler."

Tyler cleared his throat again. "What I have to say may seem incredibly silly. Yes, indeed. I may be a complete fool to have come here at all, but I simply had to. The fact is, I—had a dream."

Daley's legs hit the floor. "A dream? Listen, Mr. Tyler, we operate here on facts. What has a dream got to do with Homicide?"

"A great deal. It was a dream about a murder. Just as clear as—well, as if I'd been there."

Daley reached for a pipe so richly caked that it would drive anyone out of the office. Usually that helped to clear away pests. He got it going—hard.

"Mr. Tyler, you are an important man. In a way, I am too. The city pays me to find out who killed whom and not to listen to a man's nightmares. Unless you have something of more tangible value, please excuse me. This is my busy day."

TYLER arose, but he didn't leave the room. He picked up Daley's telephone and asked for the police commissioner. While he waited, Daley heard him mutter, "This is what I should have done in the first place."

He talked to the commissioner for a moment, then handed Daley the telephone. Daley took it, mumbled something and did a lot of listening.

"Yes, sir," he said. "But you don't understand the facts. He's here wasting my time by reporting a dream he had. Yes. Yes, sir. Okay."

Daley hung up, swiveled around and glared at Tyler. "Let's hear the dream," he said disgustedly.

Tyler smiled. A smile of triumph. "It doesn't pay to cross some men. I'm one of those kind, Sergeant. Very well This is my dream. It happened last night. I retired about the usual time, shortly after midnight My servants were all abed by then too. There was no reason for that

dream. I had nothing to eat before retiring. Do you follow me?"

"You had nothing to eat," Daley said wearily. "So you dreamed."

"Yes. A most astonishing thing. I was an involuntary witness to a murder. It happened in a room I've seen before, while awake. There was a green leather davenport facing me and the murderer. I was behind him, you know. Well, the murder victim sat on the davenport. I couldn't hear what was being said. It was like a silent movie.

"The victim sensed what was to happen. He arose and tried to run away. The murderer gave him no chance. He followed, and he had a knife in his hand. A strange knife. The handle seemed to gleam as if it was inlaid with green gems. He caught up with the victim, plunged the knife into his back and withdrew it. The victim fell. The murderer, still holding the knife which was now red, bent over him and slowly pressed the blade home to the heart."

"Is that all?" Daley queried softly.

"That's all. I couldn't do a thing. I awoke in a cold sweat and didn't sleep any more. I thought about it all day long until I felt the police must be told."

"Just why?" Daley asked bluntly.

"Because it was too real. Besides I knew the victim. He was a man I heartily detest. Always have. His name is Paul Lombard. The room where the murder took place is the study in his home. I think Paul Lombard really was murdered and somehow the deed was transferred to me in my dream."

Daley reached for the phone book, checked Paul Lombard's address and phone number. He dialed it and looked steadily at Tyler while he waited for the call to go through.

"If Lombard talks to you, will you be satisfied then that the police can do no more for you?"

Tyler wetted his lips and nodded. Daley heard the phone buzzing, but there was no answer. Just his luck. He'd hoped to squelch this crackpot fast. He hung up.

"Just because there is no answer means nothing, Mr. Tyler. Don't you think this has gone quite far enough?"

Tyler arose. "Please accompany me to Lombard's home. I must know. I must, or I'll never sleep again. Are you coming, Sergeant, or shall I call my friend the commissioner?"

Daley put on his coat. "I'll go along for the ride. Mr. Tyler, did it ever occur to you that should we find Lombard dead, you're in one beautiful spot?"

Tyler frowned. "I'm afraid I don't quite follow you, Sergeant."

"If Lombard is dead under the circumstances you outlined, I'll be compelled to arrest you. I don't believe in transference of thought. I don't believe a man can dream a murder and have it actually happen. I'm sure the D. A. will side with me and so will a jury. But, just to satisfy you, we'll look over Lombard's place."

LOMBARD was also a wealthy man and lived in a house big enough to harbor half a dozen good-sized families. It was dark now and the house was showing no light. Daley stopped the police car, waited for Tyler, and walked beside him to the porch. He rang the bell, heard it clamor inside.

Tyler said, "Lombard has no servants at the moment. I happen to know that. There isn't a soul who will work for him longer than a couple of weeks. His temper is vile."

Daley wondered how many changes of servants Tyler underwent every year. He pushed the bell again, then tried the door. It was locked. He walked over, cupped hands against a living room window, and rested his forehead on the edge of his hands while he tried to penetrate the gloom within. He straightened up.

"I suppose you're going to insist that I smash a window and go in anyway."

"I'll bear all responsibility," Tyler replied. "I must know whether or not he is in there dead. Break a window."

Daley sighed, drew his gun, and used the butt of it to crash a hole in the upper part of the pane. He pried away broken glass, reached through and twisted the catch. Then he raised the window and slung one leg over the sill.

"I'll open the door for you, Mr. Tyler."

Tyler nodded, moved toward the door and waited until it was unlocked. Sergeant Daley snapped a light switch and found himself in a very large reception hall. "Did your dream indicate just where the body is located?" he asked.

"Yes. I know the very room. The last door down this hallway. To your right. I'm almost afraid to go through with this."

"Just say the word," Daley said hopefully, "and we'll call it quits."

Tyler shook his head. "No, I've got to find out. I—I'll be right behind you."

Daley strode down the corridor, determined to get this over with as fast as possible. The whole thing was absurd enough to be silly, but when the commissioner issued orders, they were followed. Daley reached the door, turned the knob, flung it open. Darkness greeted him. He fumbled along the wall for the switch, found it and flooded the room with light.

"Take a good look," he said with open sarcasm. "Then go on home and go to sleep. There's nobody in here."

Tyler peered over Daley's shoulder. He raised one shaking arm and pointed in the direction of a huge, circular divan.

"He fell over there. Behind the divan. I think we ought to look. Can't see the floor from here."

Daley walked around the divan and came to an abrupt stop. He turned. "Stay right where you are," he told Tyler. "I want to know the position your dream murder victim fell into when he died."

"On his back," Tyler exclaimed and slow horror was growing in his eyes. "He had one arm raised, half covering his face. As if he—he didn't want to see the knife coming."

"How was he dressed?" Daley went on.

"Red leather slippers, a purple smoking jacket. No tie. White shirt. I think his trousers were a dark color."

Daley said, "Come over here, Mr. Tyler, and take a look at something much more real than a dream."

They stared down at the dead man. There was a knife driven hilt-deep in his chest. The knife had a handle set with

some kind of green stones. One arm was stiffly crooked over the face. The corpse wore red leather slippers, dark blue trousers and a purple smoking jacket. The shirt had been white. It was black in the area of the wound. Lombard had been dead for hours.

Tyler backed away slowly. "Then it was true! It did happen!"

"Did you see the face of the murderer?" Daley asked crisply.

"No. No, I didn't. His back was toward me, as I told you."

"If you'd like to see his face," Daley said slowly. "Turn around and have a good look."

Tyler gulped. That immense load of *savoir-faire* he carried, was completely gone now. He turned and looked straight into a large, gold-framed mirror. His own ashen face looked back at him. He just stared and didn't even make a move until something metallic closed around his left wrist. It was a handcuff.

"The charge," Daley said, "is homicide. Nobody can dream a thing like this. You knew too much about it, my friend. Make a break and I'll flatten you. This, Mr. Tyler, is one case where wealth, friends and influence mean nothing. You're in the same category with any drunken stevedore who knifes a pal during a street fight. Murder doesn't respect classes."

TYLER made absolutely no protest. Daley called headquarters, submitted a brief report and asked for the squad. In a short time the place was swarming. Outside, patrolmen were having a hard time trying to keep out the press. When a man of Tyler's calibre is arrested for murder, that becomes front page news.

They took a number of flashlight shots of him as Daley led the man out of the house to a waiting police car. Tyler settled back in the seat. So far he hadn't uttered a word. He seemed so stupefied that

speech refused to come.

"Want to tell me the truth now?" Daley asked casually.

Tyler found his voice. "I did tell the truth. It *was* a dream. I *was* home in bed. I didn't kill him; I just knew he'd been murdered. You've got to believe me, Sergeant."

"I don't," Daley answered sharply. "I never will."

Tyler drew himself up and stared at the gleaming steel bracelet around his wrist. "I've been so stunned that I scarcely realized what has happened to me. Sergeant, I shall prove my innocence and I shall charge you with false arrest."

Daley eyed him coldly. "If you want to admit murdering Lombard, go ahead. Otherwise stop talking. I'm sick of listening to your crazy prattle. You killed Lombard. Maybe you walk in your sleep, I don't know, but you killed him and I'm making a formal charge of murder. Hire all the lawyers you wish. Bring any influence you have to bear. See what good it will do you. Or say, Tyler, are you trying to build up a defense of insanity?"

"I am not. Wait, Sergeant, and you will see just how far my influence does go. I predict that you will be back on a beat very shortly. You're stupid and vicious. I shall insist that someone else be put in charge of this case."

Daley chuckled and lit a cigarette. "Don't worry, someone else will take charge. The district attorney. Okay, Tyler, here is where you'll roost for awhile. In a plain, ordinary murderer's cell. Get out."

But charged with murder or not, Tyler still had influence enough to call for attorneys and have half a dozen of the very best respond to his summons.

Daley wasn't worried. He quickly set about finding a motive. Tyler had invested large sums in a certain business and wanted complete control of it. Paul Lombard owned enough stock to crimp Tyler's style and refused to sell. They'd had several arguments about it. Daley found half a dozen witnesses who would testify to this.

He visited Tyler's enormous home, occupying three floors of one of the very best apartment buildings. There were elevator operators on duty twenty-four hours a day. None had seen Tyler leave the place around the time of the murder although they recalled taking him up at nine o'clock.

The murder, Daley determined from the Medical Examiner, had taken place about four in the morning. Tyler's alibi for that time consisted of his story about a dream. He'd been home and asleep in his own bed.

There was a butler, a Filipino houseman, two maids, and a cook. All lived in the apartment and all swore that Tyler had retired about his usual time and so far as they knew, had not left the place. Yet not one could swear he'd been in bed at four o'clock. Sergeant Daley realized he couldn't prove that Tyler was out of the apartment at the time of the killing, but neither could Tyler prove that he was in bed.

BY MID-MORNING Daley arrived at the district attorney's office. Esmond, the D.A., was a man who stood behind police and battled for them to the last inning. A tall, white-haired man, feared by criminals and respected by attorneys.

Esmond said, "I don't know, Sergeant. Usually, when you bring in a case, there's little question about it. But Tyler is wealthy, important, and by no means a fool."

Daley lit a cigarette and grinned. "There must be something of a fool in his makeup, sir. Imagine coming in with a story about a dream. Why, he described everything we found in Lombard's house. He must have been there to know how the body fell, about the wound in the back, and the one in the heart. How the dead man was dressed and everything else. You don't, by any chance, believe he actually did dream all this?"

Esmond shook his head. "No, I don't. But I'm just as frank to admit that Tyler can get any number of scientists, so called, who will swear that such a thing is possible. They'll make a jury groggy.

People have a certain tendency to believe in such things, whether they admit it or not. How did Tyler's motive for the crime stack up?"

Daley told him and the D.A. nodded. "Not bad. We've convicted people on less motive than that. Alibi?"

"Not a shred of one," Daley said. "Just his word that he was home in bed, asleep, and dreaming like sixty."

Esmond stared into space for a moment. "That helps, of course, but remember that it's up to us to prove he was present at the scene of the crime. How about tackling that phase?"

"I'm working on it now," Daley said. "When do you intend to indict him?"

"Today. The indictment either has to be gone through with or I'll have to release him. He's already brought together a formidable battery of lawyers. The indictment will be easy. But Tyler is certain to demand a swift trial, so go to work."

Daley went to work. For two weeks he worked harder than he'd ever done in his career as a detective. The net results were nil. There simply was not a single clue pinning Tyler to the scene of the crime. There were even times when Daley wondered if Tyler was telling the truth. That, by some mysterious power, the murder had been transferred to the rich man's dreams.

Doggedly, he questioned everyone who knew Tyler and Lombard even remotely. He questioned neighbors, milkmen, patrolmen, anyone who had business in the vicinity of Lombard's residence around the time of the murder. Nothing developed.

The D.A., Esmond, was worried too. "If I drop the case, we'll be laughed at, Sergeant. The pressure from Tyler's friends is growing terrific."

Daley shrugged. "The answer is simple. If you believe in fairy tales, let him go free. If you don't, prosecute him. There is one thing I have had jabbed at me so often I hear it in my sleep. Nobody likes Tyler. They just fear him. He's the biggest braggart I've ever encountered. Right now, he has jail guards hopping and

scared of him. I'd like to break that ego open wide."

"So would I," Esmond sighed. "But how? We've so little to go on. True, his story is preposterous and weak, but I know the type of defense he'll put up. Frankly, I've consulted with men of science. All of them tell me what Tyler claims to have experienced is impossible. I can put fifty on the stand to testify to it. Tyler will put a hundred more on the stand to say it's possible."

Sergeant Daley puffed slowly on a cigarette. "It's up to you, sir. I've done all I can do. Maybe if you just let him go free, but keep the indictment open, we'll stumble onto something or he'll give himself away."

"I'll think it over. Come back tomorrow," Esmond said. "This thing is getting me down."

Sergeant Daley left the office and went to work again, just as vainly as before. All he could do was go over the same ground again and again. Looking for the infinitesimal something that would break down Tyler's story. If it existed, the clue was small enough to hide behind an atom.

Newspaper stories were beginning to turn to Tyler's side. The more enterprising reporters got interviews with psychoanalysts, psychologists, and even gypsy dream doctors. The stuff made interesting reading, but had no foundation. Daley was sick of the whole thing when he reached the D.A.'s office next morning.

He found Esmond even more worried than he was. The D.A. looked up at Daley. "We're in a fine mess," he said. "I made up my mind to quash the indictment, let him go, and try to get something on him later. I made the offer to his chief counsel. It didn't work. Tyler insists that we've gone too far. That people will always believe he may have killed Lombard. He wants to go to trial. In fact, he demands it."

Daley groaned. "And that offer automatically weakened our case before the trial even started. How long can you stall?"

"The case is scheduled for one week

from today and I can't stop it. If I admit I have not sufficient evidence, Tyler will demand his freedom. We've got to go through with it."

DALEY kept on investigating with no better results than before. The day of the trial found him tired and disgusted. His disgust grew even greater when Tyler was led into court. The man smiled as if he were bestowing favors upon everyone. His egotism was superb and Daley hated the man with a fine intensity.

For three days, Daley and a packed courtroom listened to experts testify about dreams. The jury had been glassy-eyed for two days. Right now, Daley knew, they'd find Tyler not guilty on the face of evidence that had been introduced so far. Tyler's lawyers were having a field day. It was excellent publicity for them.

Esmond worked hard. He tried every legal trick. Tyler went on the witness stand and told his story. He didn't embellish it, and his voice and manner were those of a sincere man. Yet Daley, seated at the D.A.'s table, eyed the man and knew he was sizing up a smart killer.

That night Sergeant Daley didn't sleep at all. He paced the floor, barking his shins on furniture in the darkened room. He smoked cigarettes by the dozen and wished he'd picked some easier way of making a living. By morning, he was hollow-eyed, footsore and still determined. The defense had rested the afternoon before. Esmond had no witnesses to call in rebuttal. The summing-up speeches would take place today. Daley knew, without the slightest question, that Tyler would be a free man within twenty-four hours.

While the defendant's chief lawyer made his speech, Daley whispered to Esmond. The D.A. shook his head persistently.

"You've got to do it," Daley said, "otherwise, a guilty man is going free. This is the smartest scheme ever invented to kill a man and get away with it."

"But what you are asking is impossible. I'll be disbarred, Sergeant."

Daley dropped his voice until Esmond had to bend closer to hear. The detective

said, "You don't have to know a thing about it. This is all on my own hook. I need your co-operation in only one thing. Keep talking to that jury until after dark. Insist that you can't interrupt your speech. You've got to keep court in session until it's dark."

Esmond bit his lip. "All right, I'll do it. Personally, I think you're as crazy as Tyler's story, but go ahead. I'll talk myself hoarse."

"Good." Daley was eying the jury. "Right at this moment, how would you say it was going?"

Esmond groaned. "In the corridors, at lunch recess, I heard the bets were thirty-to-one in Tyler's favor. We were licked before this began, Sergeant. We're being routed now."

Daley spent a very busy afternoon. Most of it convincing certain friends that they had to help him even at considerable risk. There was only one item that helped Daley. Everyone hated Tyler and longed to see him punished if he was guilty.

At five-thirty, the jury began to grow restless. Esmond was still hammering at them to disbelieve the dream experts, to realize that Tyler couldn't possibly have dreamed a murder in all its intricate details. He rammed home the motive, skimmed over the alibi neatly and knew very well the jury wasn't being convinced at all. Even the judge was commencing to look skeptical.

But Esmond put it over. He stalled until seven o'clock when it was good and dark. Then he sat down, feeling like someone who'd just been put through a Gestapo ordeal. The judge glanced at his watch.

"The court will now instruct the jury. This is slightly irregular, but the court's charge will be very brief. The jury may then have dinner before starting their deliberations."

Daley was on the verge of chewing his fingernails during the brief charge to the jury. Tyler and his attorneys were enjoying this to the hilt. They believed that Esmond had made a complete idiot of himself by holding the jury so late. They'd

want to go home and they'd render a verdict on the first ballot.

IT WAS over finally. The jury filed out to have dinner. The judge went to his chambers and courtroom attendants lounged idly in their chairs. Reporters rushed out to snatch a meal somewhere nearby, guided only by the fact that the jury was bound to take at least an hour to eat. Everyone knew the verdict would be swiftly determined.

Tyler and most of his attorneys stayed in court. Daley idly walked over to where the wealthy defendant was sitting. He tapped Tyler on the shoulder.

"Can I talk to you for a moment?" he said.

Tyler was egotistically magnanimous about it. "Of course, Sergeant."

Daley led him to one of the benches far to the left of the courtroom. As far away from the jury box as possible.

"I'm a funny guy," he said slowly. "I realize the odds are in your favor, but I'd like to make a little bet. Say my fifty dollars against a thousand. How about it?"

"That I'll be convicted?" Tyler exclaimed. "Of course, I'll take the bet. Shall we shake hands on it?"

They did and Daley began talking rapidly. About anything at all, just to keep Tyler busy. Suddenly every light in the courtroom winked out. In a few moments, a bailiff appeared with a couple of candles. He put these on the judge's bench.

"Sorry," he informed everyone in the room, "there's been a power failure. The lights ought to come back on any minute."

Perhaps five minutes went by. In the feeble light of two candles, the courtroom was a mass of shadows and deceptive light. Then another bailiff entered. The jury was ready with a verdict. A shadowy form mounted the bench and the bailiff's gavel rapped for order.

"We are somewhat inconvenienced," the judge said, "but I'm certain justice can be rendered in this gloom as well as in bright light. Has the jury reached a

verdict?"

The foreman, hardly visible in the semi-darkness, arose. "We have, Your Honor. We find the defendant Not Guilty!"

Tyler laughed harshly. "Well, Sergeant, that's that. I'll take my fifty dollars if you please."

The judge was droning something about the prisoner being discharged. Daley said, "You won it, Mr. Tyler. Fair and square. You can never be charged with the murder of Paul Lombard again. Your victory is complete. But tell me something, just between the two of us, did you really kill Lombard? I never believed a man lived who was clever enough to get away with murder on such a simple defense as you offered. Did you kill him?"

Tyler laughed. "Of course I did. You knew it all the time. I could feel that, but I wasn't afraid because I'm a clever man, Sergeant. I've made millions by using my brain. I've amounted to something because I am smart. Do you think I was afraid for one moment? Certainly not, because I planned all this. I knew exactly how it would turn out."

"Like that, eh?" Daley mumbled, in a thoroughly chastened voice.

"Just like that. I'm a man who did the impossible. I always do the impossible. I killed Lombard and got away with it. Furthermore, Sergeant, if you try to tell anyone I confessed to the crime, I'll deny it, naturally. I'll make more of a fool of you than I have already. Anyway, even a full confession on my part wouldn't make any difference now. I've been fairly tried, found not guilty and discharged. You cannot place a man's life in jeopardy twice."

Daley said, in a loud voice, "That's all I wanted to know. Turn the lights on again, boys."

TYLER gave a shriek of dismay at what he saw when the lights came back on. There was nobody on the bench. In the jury box sat an assorted group of detectives and reporters, all smiling broadly at Tyler. This wasn't the jury at all.

Daley said, "Mr. Tyler, this trick could-

n't possibly have worked with a man any less egotistical than you. For a month I've studied your character and traits. You always boast about your victories. This would have been your greatest, and I felt sure you'd brag about it after you felt certain you were quite safe."

"It's a frameup," Tyler rasped, "but it won't work. I'll deny I ever said a word. I'll sue you."

"Every word you said was recorded," Daley told him. "And overheard by men hidden right behind us. It was the only way we could make a man we knew was a murderer, convict himself. The jury is still out. It will be discharged without rendering a verdict and a new jury impanelled. The judge, in his chambers, heard every word. It was piped to him over wires placed yesterday. He had nothing to do with this scheme, but he'll appreciate how well it worked."

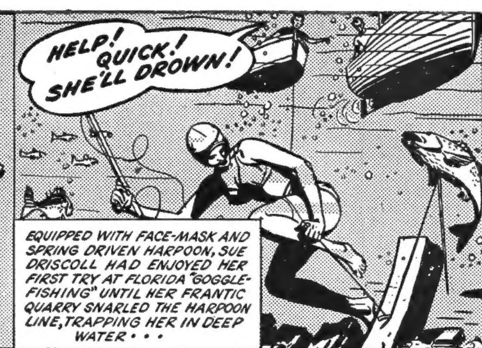
"You can't get away with it," Tyler howled. "My lawyers! Where are they? I've been tricked."

Daley said, "You certainly have, Tyler. Your lawyers won't be able to get you out of this one. All along, everyone in this courtroom has felt that you were guilty, but realized the proof was lacking. Now we have the proof. It was easy for you to slip out of your apartment without being noticed and get back again. You had incredibly good luck in not being seen by a soul on your way to and from Lombard's house.

"Oh yes, it was all thought out. You knew you'd be arrested after reporting the murder as part of your dream. You wanted to be arrested. You insisted upon a trial, forced the D.A.'s hand. You had to be found not guilty, discharged, and thereupon never liable to arrest for this murder again. In that way your mind would be free of worry.

"Clever? Yes, of course. Devilishly clever. The only way to make you admit your guilt was by means of a trick. A fake judge and jury. You'll be punished for the murder of Paul Lombard. Want to make another bet on that, Mr. Tyler? A real one this time?"

JIM DIVED INTO TROUBLE BUT THEN...



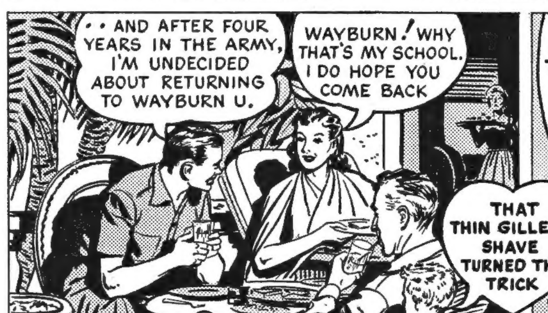












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